The PONY-RIDER-BOYS IN NEW ENGLAND

FRANK GEE PATCHIN

THE PONY RIDER BOYS SERIES

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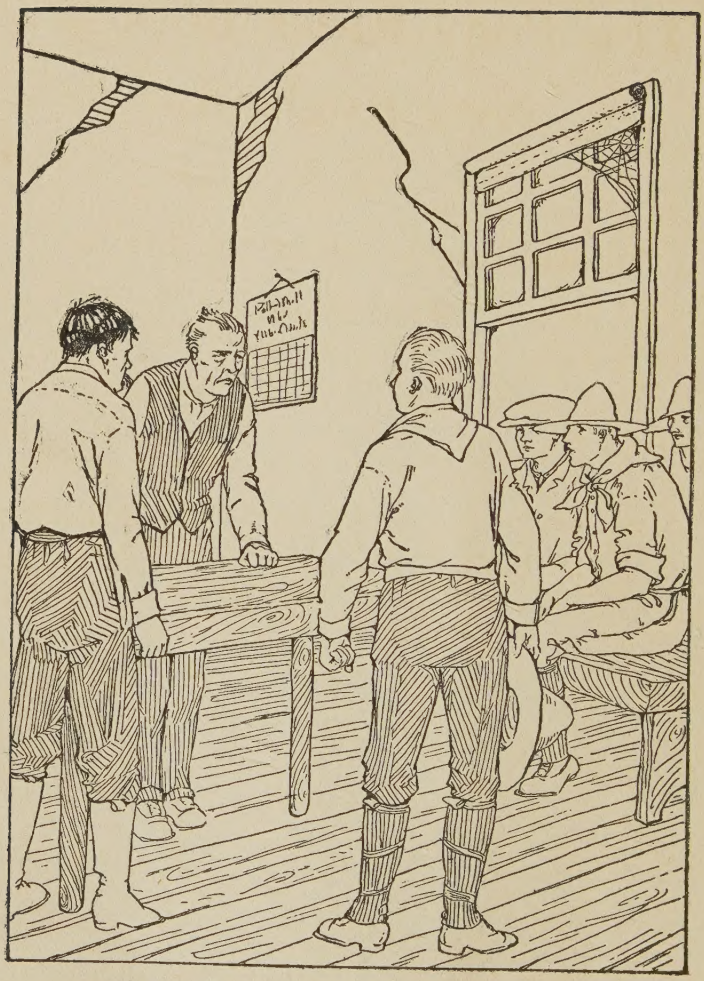

"I Fine You One Hundred Dollars and Costs!"

Frontispiece

The Pony Rider Boys in New England

OR

An Exciting Quest in the Maine Wilderness

By

FRANK GEE PATCHIN

Author of The Pony Rider Boys in the Rockies, The Pony Rider Boys in Texas, The Pony Rider Boys in Montana, The Pony Rider Boys in the Ozarks, The Pony Rider Boys on the Alkali, The Pony Rider Boys in New Mexico, The Pony Rider Boys in the Grand Canyon, The Pony Rider Boys with the Texas Rangers, The Pony Rider Boys on the Blue Ridge, etc., etc.

Illustrated

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CONTENTS

PAGE

CHAPTER I—A BITTER DISAPPOINTMENT..... 11
The original wonder of Chillicothe. Tad makes a sacrifice for his mother's sake. Plotters get their heads together. A Pony Rider Boy left behind. A dash to the open country.

CHAPTER II—CAMPING ON THE PISCATAQUI..... 26
Words of wisdom from the guide. Chunky's proposal is voted down. Tad Butler surprises his fellows. An exhibition of horsemanship. "I never saw anything like that outside of a circus."

CHAPTER III—A JOYFUL REUNION..... 37
A gentleman in the woodpile. A name with a handle at both ends. Tad voices his regrets. Indian Charlie John joins the outfit. Wild howls startle the Pony Rider camp.

CHAPTER IV—BAITING THE HONEY BEES..... 48
The Indian's pack lands on Chunky. "I'm killed! I'm killed!" Cale Vaughn shows the boys how to lure the bees. Stacy gets a new idea. Tad learns to walk up a tree.

PAGE

CHAPTER V—NEW TRICKS IN WOODCRAFT..... 60
Camp making a science. How to make a browse-bed. How to cache food so animals cannot get it. Why the boy's fire always failed. Making a fire in the rain. The woodsman's trick.

CHAPTER VI—THE FAT BOY'S REVENGE..... 70
In the heart of the big woods. Coons hold nightly conversations. Stacy loses himself six times in one morning. Oil of anise draws unwelcome visitors. Bees in force attack the Indian.

CHAPTER VII—STAMPEDED BY AN INTRUDER..... 80
A bear comes to camp on the anise trail. Charlie John up a tree. What happened when the bear kissed Chunky. "Fat boy him up a tree." Tad ropes Mr. Bruin; then the fun begins.

CHAPTER VIII—AN INTERRUPTED FORAGE..... 91
The bear gets a section of Tad's trousers. Boys take to the trees and Bruin takes the camp. Cale shoots to kill. Stacy's practical joke is exposed. "The boss bee was scouting for me."

CHAPTER IX—BEAR STEAK FOR BREAKFAST..... 101
Bruin causes a change of camp. Chunky's heart is weak when there is work to do. Learning to make a "kitchi-plak-wagn" and a "kekauviscoe saster." "Oh, help!" wails Chunky.

PAGE

CHAPTER X—BLAZING A FOREST TRAIL..... 113
"Every time you turn around the scenery has shifted." Learning to live in the woods. Birch bark lights the way. "Silver Face is calling me." A difficult job well done.

CHAPTER XI—FACING NEW OBSTACLES..... 124
Camping in the rain in the dark of night. "Don't be scared, boys, I'm going to shoot!" Stacy decides that he has had enough. Tad Butler noses out the way.

CHAPTER XII—CHUNKY MEETS A BULL MOOSE..... 133
"Indians have sharp eyes." Stacy beholds a terrifying sight. Charged by an angry moose. Too frightened to yell. The bull bumps his head against a tree.

CHAPTER XIII—AN EXCITING DAY IN CAMP..... 140
The fat boy slays his helpless victim. "I did it with my little knife." Chunky's boasts are loud and vigorous. Tad Butler makes a little investigation on his own hook. The guide holds opinions about Stacy's bravery.

CHAPTER XIV—LAID UP BY AN ACCIDENT..... 151
Broken bones put the guide out of business. First aid to the injured. Chunky lets the cat out of the bag. The timber cruiser hears the story of the fat boy's prowess. "I guess I've got a right to talk about myself if I want to."

PAGE

CHAPTER XV—A DISASTROUS JOURNEY..... 160
Bears strip the camp of food. Charlie John and Stacy set out for town. "I'd like to see the place where Chunky could not get into trouble." The Indian returns alone. "Chunky is in jail at Matungamook!"

CHAPTER XVI—BAD NEWS FROM THE FRONT..... 171
Pony Rider Boys go to their chum's assistance. A grilling night journey. Charlie John leads the way. The arrival at the scene of trouble. Twittering birds the harbingers of an eventful day.

CHAPTER XVII—CHUNKY IN A PREDICAMENT..... 182
A frying pan awakens the Indian. "Game warden git fat boy!" What came of Stacy's bragging. Called before the bar of justice. "Where is the prisoner?"

CHAPTER XVIII—THE VERDICT OF THE COURT..... 193
"Stacy did not leave much to the imagination, did he?" The same old moose with new trimmings. "Stacy Brown, stand up!" The fat boy brags to the court. The Professor voices his indignation. "One hundred dollars and costs! Pay your fine or go to jail!"

CHAPTER XIX—PAYING THE FIDDLER..... 201
"Can you cross my palm for $128.50?" Not money enough in the outfit to pay Chunky's fine. Stacy loses his pony. Looks like a week of fasting for the Pony Rider Boys. Dead broke in the Maine woods. The wolf at the door.

PAGE

CHAPTER XX—"LOOK WHO'S HERE!" 210
Tad and Ned get a job and earn fifty cents. His companions punish the fat boy. Cale Vaughn hears the news and hurries to town. The guide proves himself a friend in need.

CHAPTER XXI—YOUNG WOODSMEN ON THE TRAIL AGAIN 217
"I don't want to be like other folks." Blaze marks lead the boys astray. Tad follows a year-old trail. On the verge of a panic. "We are lost!" declares Butler.

CHAPTER XXII—LOST IN THE BIG WOODS 225
"When you are lost sit down and think it over." Tad and Stacy find themselves in a predicament. "There is nothing like being a cheerful idiot." "Get ready for trouble!"

CHAPTER XXIII—AN EXCITING QUEST 231
The ponies stampeded. A raging moose wrecks the camp. Chunky up a tree again. Tad shows his resourcefulness. Dishes are made from bark. Dining with nature.

CHAPTER XXIV—THE SIGNAL SMOKE 241
Tad rounds up the live stock. "Chunky would hoodoo the best organized force in the world." Cale Vaughn on the trail of the lost. "Heap big smoke!" Charlie John makes a discovery. The end of the long trail.

THE PONY RIDER BOYS IN NEW ENGLAND

CHAPTER I

A BITTER DISAPPOINTMENT

"HERE'S Tad. He'll tell us," cried Walter Perkins. "Oh, Tad, how long a trip is it to the Maine Woods from here?"

"That depends upon whether you walk or ride," answered Tad Butler, walking slowly up to the barn of Banker Perkins where three brown-faced boys were sitting in the doorway, polishing bridles, mending saddles and limbering up their lassos.

"Of course you know what we mean," urged Ned Rector with a grin.

"Yes, I know what you mean."

"He isn't mean. You're the mean one," interjected Stacy Brown, otherwise known among his fellows as Chunky, the Fat Boy.

"Chunky, remember we are at home in Chilli-

cothe now and are supposed to set examples to our less fortunate fellow citizens. Any fellow who can get into the village paper the way you have done ought to hold his head pretty high," chuckled Rector.

Stacy threw out his chest.

"You mean that lion-catching article?"

Ned nodded.

"Yes, that was a pretty swell article. They think I'm the original wonder here in Chillicothe."

"You are. There can be no doubt of that," laughed Tad.

"I'm glad you've come, Tad," continued Ned, turning to young Butler. "We are planning for the new trip to the Maine Woods. I shall be glad to get east. I've never been far east. Any of the rest of you been east?"

"Well, I have been out to Skinner's farm. That's east of the village," declared Stacy Brown.

"Please, please!" begged Ned, a pained expression appearing on his face. "Leave all that sort of nonsense to entertain us after we get into the woods. We don't mind so much your playing the fool when we are away from home, but here it is different. We don't want to be disgraced in this town where we are—"

"Some pumpkins," finished Chunky.

"Well, yes; that's it, I guess," agreed Ned.

"We were waiting for you to talk over what we should take along," declared Walter. "I have been studying and reading and talking with Abe Parkinson, who, you know, used to live up in Maine. He says we must travel very light; that going is hard up there in the woods. He says we don't want an ounce of excess baggage, or we'll never get anywhere. Do you know anything about it, Tad?"

"Yes. I guess Mr. Parkinson is right about that. It will be real roughing, perhaps more so than anything you fellows ever have experienced, for you will be a long way from civilization."

"But we'll get plenty to eat, won't we?" begged Stacy, glancing anxiously at Tad.

"You usually do."

"Chunky can browse on green leaves if we get out of food," chuckled Rector.

"Now, I call that real mean," complained the fat boy. "What did I ever do to you to merit such a fling as that?"

"You made a noise like a rattlesnake once and got me dumped into the bushes. Remember that?"

Chunky did. An appreciative grin spread over his round face.

"I haven't got even with you for that, but I

shall some day, and mine will be a terrible revenge. Br-r-r!"

"Oh, fudge!" scoffed the fat boy. "You talk easily, but no one is afraid of you."

"We aren't here to fight," reproved Walter. "We are here to talk over our journey, and now that Tad has arrived let's get to business, as father would say."

"Especially if you owed him money and couldn't pay it," laughed Stacy.

"Are you all ready, Tad?"

Tad's face grew serious.

"Boys, I'm afraid I can't go with you this time," answered Butler in a low tone.

"Can't go?" exploded the boys.

"No, I think not, this time. Some other time, perhaps."

"Nonsense! Is this some kind of joke?" demanded Rector.

"It's no joke, Ned. I mean it."

"But what—why—"

"I'll tell you, boys."

"Don't tell us. We can't bear to hear disagreeable things," mourned Stacy.

"Go on, Tad, we want to know," urged Walter.

"Well, the whole thing is that Mother isn't well. She hasn't been well all winter. She is not so well now as she was a month ago, and—"

Tad swallowed and moistened his lips with his tongue.

"I couldn't think of leaving her alone, just now; no, not for anything."

"Then you won't go?" questioned Stacy.

Tad shook his head.

"That settles it. Neither will I," decided Chunky.

"Oh, yes you will. You will go on just the same as before, and you will have just as good a time. After you get out into the open again you'll forget that I am not along."

"What! Do you think I would trust my precious person to these savages?" demanded the fat boy with a gesture that took in Ned Rector and Walter Perkins. "Why, I'd never come back!"

"No great loss if you didn't," muttered Rector.

Tad laughed.

"You are old enough to take care of yourself, Chunky. You will have the Professor to protect you in case anything goes wrong."

"No, we can't have it that way," declared Perkins, with a slow shake of the head. "If you don't go, we don't. But really, I don't see why you can't. My folks will look after Mrs. Butler, and—"

Tad shook his head with emphasis.

"My mind is made up," he said.

"Oh, that's too bad," groaned the lads. "That is a burning shame," added Stacy. "I'm hot all over. That's why I know it's a burning shame."

"Leave off joking," commanded Ned savagely. "This isn't anything to laugh about. What appears to be the matter with your mother, Tad?"

"I—I think it's her lungs," replied the boy a bit unsteadily.

"What she needs is mountain air," declared Chunky. "I know. She ought to go to the mountains."

"I agree with you," said Tad. "It is my idea that I can get her to go with me, for part of the summer at least, and then—"

"What's the matter with taking her along with us?" interrupted Rector.

"No, that wouldn't do," answered Tad. "She couldn't stand it."

"Of course she couldn't. That shows how much you know, Ned Rector," scoffed Stacy Brown.

"What do you propose to do all summer, Tad?" asked Ned thoughtfully.

"Oh, I shall work at something. I'm not going to be idle. Perhaps Mr. Perkins will have something to do that will keep me out of mis-

chief for the summer after I get back," answered Butler with a faint smile.

"It's my opinion that this is all foolishness," declared Ned. "I'm going to see your mother."

Tad laid a hand on Ned's arm. "Please say nothing to my mother about it. My mind is made up, and that's all there is to it. Of course, it will be a bitter disappointment to me not to go with you, but I guess I shall get over it. It would be more bitter to me if anything—anything happened to mother."

"And the Professor is coming on next week," muttered Walter. "I guess we had better give it up for this season, fellows."

"No. I won't have it that way," urged Tad. "You'll make me feel worse about it if you do anything like that. Your plans are made."

"Yes, we will let things stand as they are for the present," agreed Rector. "But I shan't give up the idea that you are going with us. Why—but what's the use in talking about it? Walt, is your father at home?"

"He is at the bank."

"Then I'm going over to see him."

"What about?" questioned Tad suspiciously.

"I've got a little matter of business that I want to talk over with him."

"Want to borrow some money, eh?" grinned Chunky.

"No, we'll leave that business to you."

"That reminds me, Tad, could you—could you cross my palm for five cents this afternoon?" asked the fat boy solemnly.

"Eh? Do what?"

"Cross my palm for five cents?"

"Say, this is a new habit, isn't it, this borrowing money?"

"Oh, I'll pay you back when I get my allowance," protested Stacy.

"I wasn't thinking about that. Take my word for it, this borrowing business is bad business," rebuked Tad.

"Didn't I always pay you back everything I borrowed of you?" protested Stacy indignantly.

"Yes, yes, but—here's your five cents. Will that be enough?"

"Well," reflected the fat boy, "you might make it twenty-five if you are flush to-day."

Tad passed over a quarter, the other boys regarding the proceeding with disapproving eyes.

"Now that you have made a touch, is it permissible to ask what you are going to do with all that money?" inquired Rector.

"It is."

"Well?"

"They've got a lot of fresh buns over at the

bakery. I can get thirty-six of them for a quarter. It's a bargain, too."

"Buns!" growled Ned in a tone of disgust. "Don't you ever think of anything but something to eat?"

"Yes—something that I haven't got to eat."

"Go get your buns and pass them around," suggested Walter smilingly.

"I guess not. There won't be more than enough for me," answered Stacy.

"There's selfishness for you," nodded Ned.

But Ned did Stacy an injustice. The fat boy was simply teasing the others. He intended to bring back the "bargain" and share it with his companions, which he did shortly after that, though Tad was not there to help eat the hot buns that Stacy brought.

Little more was said on the subject nearest to the hearts of the boys, but their disappointment was keen at Tad's decision not to accompany them on their visit to the Maine Woods, for which place they were to start within a few days.

"I can't wait for the buns," said Tad. "I must be getting home, but I will help you boys get ready for the trip and see you off."

"No, you won't see us off," shouted Ned. "You will see yourself off along with the rest of us."

To this young Butler merely shook his head as he turned away, retracing his steps towards home. For a few minutes after Tad's departure, Ned Rector and Walter Perkins sat with heads close together, talking earnestly. Finally Walter got up and started for his father's place of business at a brisk walk. Later in the afternoon there was a conference between Walter and his parents.

In the meantime Tad had gone home. He had been insistent that he would not leave his mother, and Mrs. Butler was fully as insistent that he should accompany his companions on their coming journey. But Tad was firm. It was the first time he ever had opposed his mother so stubbornly. Mrs. Butler had been ailing for some time and Tad was greatly worried over her condition. It was this concern for the mother that was on the boy's mind now, rather than his disappointment at not being able to go with his friends. There was only one encouraging factor; his mother, while not well-to-do, was far from being in want. Though she did not feel that she should incur the expense of going away, Tad was determined that she should.

Late in the afternoon Banker Perkins and his wife called at the Butler home and had a long talk with Mrs. Butler. Tad had ridden out

of town on his pony to bring in some horses that had been shipped in from the west to be sold. There were some "tough ones" in the bunch of western stock, and none of the town boys could be induced to help corral and drive in the stock for the owner. This work was a recreation for Tad, and the five dollars a day that he received for his services during the sale, in cutting out, roping and riding mustangs for prospective buyers, he considered the easiest money he had ever earned. Besides this, Tad's riding was an exhibition in itself, and it drew scores of spectators. The result was that the five dollars a day paid to Tad was a most excellent investment for the owner.

The coast being clear for the rest of the afternoon, Mr. Perkins and his wife were uninterrupted in their talk with Mrs. Butler. Mrs. Butler, like her son, possessed a mind of her own, and the banker had some difficulty in bringing her around to his point of view, but before the Perkinses left the Butler home Mrs. Butler had agreed to their plans, not so much on her own account as that of the boy of whom she was so justly proud. It was decided between them, however, to leave matters as they were for the present.

"I want to try the boy a little further," added the banker. "Of course, I know him pretty

well now, but if he goes through with what he has declared he will, you need never worry about his success in life. A boy who can do that is all right in every way."

The week drew to a close. Tad had completed his work with the horse dealer and collected his money, which he turned over to his mother on Saturday night.

"At this rate I'll be able to retire by and by," smiled the lad.

"You will have more money to spend on your trip this summer," was the reply.

"Yes. My trip with you to the mountains."

"Oh, no, I didn't mean that. You know what I mean, Tad."

"I'm not going, mother. My mind is made up."

"Will it be much of a disappointment to you if you do not go with your friends?"

"Now, you know it won't," replied Tad playfully, as he passed an arm around his mother's waist. "What fun could I possibly have that would compare with going away with you and seeing you grow back into perfect health?"

Mrs. Butler smiled proudly, though she sighed at the thought of the pleasant jaunt that her son offered so readily to give up.

A few days later the other boys decided that they would go on without Tad if they must,

though they grumbled a good deal. Tad Butler came forward, taking a hearty interest in all their preparations for their hike in the saddle. He put their kits in shape, made a new lariat for Ned Rector, mended the tents, and in general threw himself as heartily into all the advance work as though he were going himself. On the day of their departure Professor Zepplin arrived to take charge of the party, as he had been doing for several seasons past.

Three of the boys and the Professor rode to the station, there to car their stock, Tad plodding along on foot, feeling strangely unfamiliar with himself at such a time. Yet, from young Butler's smiling face, one would have thought him the happiest of all in the party that gathered at the station, and perhaps down in his heart he was happy, knowing that he was doing what he knew to be his duty to the mother that he loved so well. There was a real shadow, however, on the happiness of his companions—the inability of Tad to go with them on their summer's outing.

Mr. Perkins was at the station to see the boys off. He, with Tad and half a hundred villagers, stood on the platform waving their hats and shouting their good-byes to the departing Pony Rider Boys. As the train pulled out, Stacy Brown was observed hanging over the

railing of the rear coach wiping his eyes and pretending to weep, while the spectators laughed at the funny sight.

Mr. Perkins turned inquiringly to Tad.

"Well, Tad, I suppose this isn't a particularly happy occasion for you?" he said.

"Why not, sir?"

"Don't you feel the least bit disappointed that you are not on that train yonder?"

"Of course I am disappointed, but I am satisfied that I have done right. That's the best sort of happiness after all. Don't you think so, Mr. Perkins?"

For answer the banker extended an impulsive hand, clasping Tad's in a strong, appreciative grip. Tad walked back with Mr. Perkins, leaving him at the latter's place of business, then the lone Pony Rider Boy strolled meditatively homeward.

Reaching the yard, Tad walked around to the stable, which he entered, and stepping into the stall of his pony, he patted the little animal affectionately.

The pony whinnied appreciatively.

"Well, old boy," said Tad, "you are disappointed just the same as am I. But we'll have a good many nice rides this summer. We'll ride out every night to fetch Deacon Skinner's cows home, and maybe we'll rope one now and then

just to keep our hand in. Shall we have a little ride now just to forget, you know? All right, come along then."

The pony backed from its stall as if fully understanding the words of its master. A few moments later Tad was galloping away from town, the little hoofs of his pet mount throwing up a cloud of dust on the broad highway that led to the open country and the fresh green fields.

CHAPTER II

CAMPING ON THE PISCATAQUI

A FULL week had passed since the departure of the Pony Rider Boys from Chillicothe. During that time they had leisurely made their way toward their destination, having gone by way of New York and up Long Island Sound on a boat. Eventually they had reached Bangor, on the Penobscot, whence they proceeded in a northwesterly direction to Dover, a short distance from where they were now encamped on the banks of the Piscataqui river.

At Dover they had been joined by the guide who was to accompany them. The latter was Cale Vaughn, a raw-boned, jolly-faced Yankee, much more talkative than had been most of the guides on their previous wanderings. Cale, it was said, was the best woodsman in the north, a man who simply could not be hopelessly lost in the woods. Professor Zepplin was asking the guide about this same thing as they lounged at their campfire after having eaten their breakfast on this cool but glorious spring morning.

The Professor wanted to know if it were possible for a man to be so good a woodsman that he could not be lost.

"If there is such a man I'd like to set eyes on him," answered the guide.

"Have you ever been lost in the big woods?" questioned Stacy, hoping to draw out some of Cale's experiences.

"More times than I've got hairs in my head."

"Then there isn't much hope for us after we reach the forest yonder," declared Ned Rector, nodding toward the faint fringe of deep green that lay to the northwest of them.

"It's easy enough to keep track of yourself if you follow a few simple rules," answered Vaughn.

"And what are they?" asked Walter.

"Water always runs down hill," reminded the guide with a significant smile.

"Eh? Of course it does," scoffed Stacy. "Did anyone ever see it run uphill?"

"I've known folks that thought it did," chuckled the guide. "Why, I can show you watercourses where you'd be willing to stake your life the water was running in a certain direction, whereas it's going the other way."

"Humph!" grunted Chunky. "They couldn't fool me that way."

"You think so?" laughed Cale.

"I know so," retorted Stacy.

"Well, now suppose we were standing beside a stream, say like the river before us, only in a place where the direction of the current deceived you. I said the water was running that way, the way it does, and you declared it was moving in the other direction, how would you prove whether you were right or wrong?"

Stacy puffed up with importance.

"That's easy."

"Well, answer Mr. Vaughn's question," commanded the Professor.

"Why, I'd throw Ned Rector's hat into the water. If it floated that way, I'd win. If it floated the other way, Mr. Vaughn would win. In either case Ned would lose," answered the fat boy solemnly.

"You win," grinned the guide.

"He wouldn't win if he threw *my* hat in the water," growled Rector. "Don't let me catch you tossing my hat overboard."

"Oh, I'd see to it that you didn't catch me," jeered the fat boy.

"That's funny. Even Tad would have laughed at that," spoke up Walter.

"I am afraid Tad isn't laughing just now," said Ned.

"No, I'm laughing for him. Ha, ha, ha! Haw, haw!" brayed Stacy.

"You were speaking of getting lost," Professor Zepplin reminded the guide.

"Yes. Another important thing to keep in mind is that the sun rises in the east and sets in the west. By keeping these things in mind you are likely to find your way."

"Provided you know where you are going in the first place," observed Stacy. "I don't. I'm lost before I find myself when I get in the woods."

"We will take a few lessons in woodcraft when we get into the spruce forest," promised Cale.

"By the way, we don't seem to be making much headway in that direction," answered Rector. "We have been loafing here for a whole day. Why the delay?"

"We are waiting for Charlie John," replied the guide.

Charlie John, it may be explained here, was a half-breed Indian whom the party was taking along to do the rough work, to bear the extra burdens, to help cut a path for them when they found themselves in a thicket too dense to permit the passage of the ponies. None of them, except the guide, had seen Charlie, but Cale said the fellow was all right so far as behavior was concerned, though Charlie was not overburdened with brains.

"We've got too much of that here already," replied Ned. "That's what's the trouble with our outfit."

Stacy strolled over to Rector, gravely snipped off the latter's hat and holding it top-up shook the hat vigorously.

"Nothing doing," said the fat boy, replacing the hat on the head of its owner, while Ned's face flushed, and the others laughed.

"I decline to be disturbed by Chunky's antics," howled Ned. "He thinks he's funny, but no one else does. When do you think that lazy half-breed will be along, Mr. Vaughn?"

"He should be here some time to-day," answered Cale. "If you boys want something to do why don't you go fishing? There's plenty of fish in the river here."

"Let Chunky do the fishing," drawled Ned. "It needs a lazy man to make a good fisherman."

"Oh!" cried Stacy, his face breaking out into a broad smile. "Now I understand. Remember that fine mess of trout that Ned caught when we were in the Rockies? I wish I could fish like that. I'd be willing to be called a lazy one."

"I know what you are going to get, young man," answered Rector, slowly getting to his feet.

"What am I going to get?"

"You're going to get the opportunity to prove whether you are lazy or not, for I'm going to throw you into the river right now."

"You can't do it," retorted Stacy belligerently.

"I'll show you whether I can or not."

The Professor opened his mouth to reprove the two boys, then closed it again, a smile curling his lips, causing the bristling beard to bristle still more fiercely.

With arms about each other, struggling, red of face, perspiring, Ned Rector and Stacy Brown staggered down the sloping bank towards the river, each striving with all his strength to get the upper hand of the other.

Splash!

The two boys disappeared in the water.

"Can they swim?" asked the guide, glancing a bit anxiously at the Professor.

"Like fish," answered Professor Zepplin tersely.

About that time two bobbing heads appeared above the water, only to disappear again, leaving some froth and a sea of bubbles on the surface. When next they appeared they were a long way from shore, but were swimming toward the bank, each with a hand on the other's coat collar, swimming with one hand.

"Look at the twin fish," howled Walter.

The swimmers did not answer him. They were too busy looking after themselves. Ned started to get to his feet as they reached shallow water, but Stacy was ahead of him. The fat boy butted Ned in the stomach, causing Rector to topple over, whereupon Stacy very calmly sat down on his companion's head, which was under water.

"Let him up!" cried Walter.

"Get off! He'll drown!" shouted the guide.

"Don't get excited. It will do him a lot of good to drown a few times. I've always observed that drowned persons are extremely well behaved persons."

The guide gripped Stacy by the collar and dragged him from his victim, while Walter was helping Ned up. Ned was purple in the face. He had been under water about as long as was good for him, though not quite long enough to suit the fat boy. A few seconds more, however, and Rector would have thrown Chunky, whereupon it would have been the fat boy's turn to swallow some water.

"I—I slipped," explained Ned between chokes.

"So I observed," replied Stacy solemnly.

"That was very rough and ungentlemanly, Stacy," rebuked the Professor.

"Rough on Ned, yes, sir. You would have thought so if I'd been sitting on your head under water."

"Never mind, Prof—Professor. I'll take—take care of him," coughed Rector.

"You tried it a little while ago. Mr. Vaughn, who won that bout?"

"You win on points," laughed the guide.

"If I had been a fish I'd have won in every other way. I'll tell you what, Ned. You said I was the lazy man and I ought to do the fishing. I'll do it and give you a chance to show how active you are. I will fix up a hook and line, then you jump in the water and swim around the bait just like a trout. You can make a grab for the hook once in a while if you want to. If I catch you by the upper lip I'm a good fisherman. If I don't, you are a good fish. What do you say?"

The others did the saying before Rector had a chance to speak. Chunky's proposition was too much even for the gravity of Professor Zepplin, whose body shook with laughter.

"Think I'm a trout?" growled Ned.

"No, you're a clam."

Ned started for Stacy, really angry now, but he was halted by the stern voice of the Professor.

"Young gentlemen, this thing has gone far

enough. You will lose your tempers, then there will be trouble."

"Lose our tempers?" demanded Stacy. "Why, I'm so mad now that I'm speechless. Look out for me. Somebody hold me!"

"We miss Tad Butler. He was the one who held you in check, as I see the matter now," nodded the Professor.

"I wasn't aware, Professor, that Chunky had ever been held in check," smiled Walter.

"That's what I say," agreed Ned. "It is high time something were done to curb him. There is no telling what he may not do now that Tad isn't here. I wish he were."

Stacy did not answer for the moment. He was gazing off over the rugged landscape with wondering eyes. Finally he turned, thrusting both hands in his trousers pockets, his chest swelling with importance.

"You win," he said.

"Win what?" demanded Ned sullenly.

"Your wish."

"I haven't made any wish. What did I wish?"

"You wished Tad Butler were here."

"Huh! I wish my wish might come true."

"I told you it had."

"What do you mean, Chunky?" questioned Walter suddenly.

"Why, Tad's here now. You fellows don't use your eyes. You can't any of you see beyond the ends of your noses."

The eyes of Professor Zepplin were twinkling. Cale Vaughn was regarding the lads quizzically. All at once Walter Perkins uttered a wild yell and bounding to his feet started off at a lively sprint. Ned rubbed his eyes, scarcely believing what they saw.

A horseman was galloping toward them at a fast gait. The figure of the horseman was slight, clad in khaki, a broad-brimmed sombrero waving in one hand.

"Whoo-oo-pee!" yelled the horseman, his voice coming to them faintly.

"It *is* Tad!" howled Ned, then he too started off at a run.

"They are a lively crowd, sir," observed the guide, turning to the Professor.

"You will think so before you get through with this job," answered the Professor grimly. "I have had several seasons of it, and I'm thankful to be able to say that I am still able to be about, though I have been on the verge of nervous prostration more than once."

The horseman, Tad Butler in reality, was now rapidly bearing down on the camp. Walter was far ahead of the pursuing Ned, but Chunky made no attempt to run out to meet his

companion. He was still standing with hands in trousers pockets solemnly regarding the scene.

Walter and Tad were nearing each other, when the former stumbled and fell.

Tad raised a hand and Walter, understanding, lifted one hand also, whereupon Tad charged him at a gallop. The horseman swerved at the second when it seemed as if he must run down the kneeling boy, then the palms of the two lads met with a smack, Tad having leaned from the saddle. To the amazement of Cale Vaughn, who was not much of a horseman, the slender form of Walter Perkins seemed to rise right up into the air without effort on his part.

Walt landed astride of the pony just behind the rider, and at touch of spur the little pony straightened out and reached for the camp at a full run, nearly bowling over Ned Rector, who barely got out of the way in time to save himself from being run down.

"Well, what do you think of that?" exclaimed the guide. "I never saw anything like that outside of a circus."

CHAPTER III

A JOYFUL REUNION

"HOWDY, fellows," greeted Tad laughingly as he leaped from his pony, followed by Walter who, less gracefully, fell off. "Didn't look for me just yet, did you?"

Professor Zepplin had hurried forward; his face was wreathed in smiles as he grasped the hand of the Pony Rider Boy.

"This is Mr. Vaughn, our guide," announced the Professor.

"I am very glad to know you, sir," answered Tad, smiling up into the strong face of Cale Vaughn, winning that gentleman's regard on the instant.

"And, ahem! This is Mr. Stacy Brown, the handy man," announced Chunky, pushing his way to the front and extending a hand to Tad.

"Hello, Chunky. Not growing thin, are you?"

"Be kind enough not to call attention to my superfluities. I am somewhat sensitive, you know."

"I beg your pardon," answered Tad gravely.

Just then Ned Rector came running in, puffing and blowing.

"Is that the way you treat me after I have run a mile more or less to welcome you?" demanded Ned, as Tad gripped him in a bear-like embrace.

"My, you're wet!" laughed Tad, holding Rector off to look at him.

"Yes, he's been in bathing with his clothes on," observed the fat boy solemnly. "Something ought to be done to break him of such slovenly habits. But how do you happen to be here, if I may make so bold as to inquire?"

"Don't you know?" questioned Tad, glancing at the smiling faces around him.

Stacy shook his head.

"Come over and sit down, and I'll tell you about it. By the way, have you folks anything to eat? I'm starving."

"You're not getting Chunky's disease, are you?" sneered Ned, trying to appear greatly displeased, but not making much of a success of the attempt.

"I am afraid I am, boys. Well, Mr. and Mrs. Perkins fixed it up to have Mother go with them to the mountains. You see, Mrs. Perkins is rather delicate and Mr. Perkins wanted her to go to the mountains, where he

had taken a cottage for the summer. Of course he couldn't be with her all the time, having to attend to his business at home, so he asked Mother to go along for company. In fact, I guess he insisted. Mother agreed. I think she did so that I might join you boys. I came with them as far as Utica, N. Y. You see, they went to the Adirondacks. I had to come on after they had made those plans. I think Mr. Perkins fixed it up on purpose, so we would all be satisfied. I knew Mother would be in good hands and I knew she would feel better about it if I came on and joined you."

"But how did you find us?" urged Rector.

"Why, they told me, at the village, that you were camping out here. They gave me directions so I couldn't miss you."

"Hm-m-m!" mused the fat boy, screwing up his features and regarding Tad narrowly. "How did you know we were in this part of the country?"

"Everybody in New England knows that," laughed Tad.

"Yes, they know Chunky is here," agreed Ned.

"It strikes me that there is a gentleman of color in the woodpile," observed Stacy. "In fact, I might say there are several of them hidden in the stove wood."

"Yes, I reckon you're right. And you didn't know a thing about it?" chuckled Butler.

Stacy shook his head.

"But we may have had our suspicions—our suspicions, you understand?" said the fat boy. "Still, there are several things that need explanation."

"Professor, you knew about this all the time, didn't you?" demanded Ned.

The Professor stroked his beard.

"I see no harm in saying that I did."

"He was in the conspiracy, boys, but I didn't know a thing about it until the day before I left Chillicothe," said Tad.

"Then Professor Zepplin knew about it before we left home, eh?" questioned Stacy.

"I guess he did," admitted Walter.

Stacy fixed a stern gaze on the smiling Walter Perkins.

"You in this thing, too, Walt?" he demanded.

"I plead guilty," answered Perkins, flushing violently.

"Well, I call it a shame to deceive innocent boys like that. But, sir," added Chunky, turning pompously to Tad Butler, "I welcome you in the name of the Pony Rider Boys. We will now kill the fatted calf."

"In other words, Stacy Brown," interjected Rector. "It's a good thing you are here, Tad.

There is no holding Chunky. Why, you have no idea how he is acting. Am I right, Professor?"

"I will admit that Stacy is at times inclined to be rude," nodded Professor Zepplin.

"Everybody is against me," growled Stacy. "Everything I do is the wrong thing and nothing that I do is right. You fellows don't stop to think what tame affairs these trips would be without somebody to poke fun at. I am the mark for everyone. The trouble with me is that I am not valued at my true worth. Mr. Vaughn, have you learned to know me well enough to realize how valuable I am to this company?"

"I'll confess that I should be lonesome without you," agreed the guide with a nod.

"There, I'm glad someone in this outfit has the sense to recognize a good thing when he sees it. How about a fire for cooking?"

"I will build the fire," cried Tad, proceeding at once to heap the sticks up into a little pyramid under the crane that Cale had arranged. Butler eyed the contrivance critically. "It is plain to be seen that someone has been camping before. That is an excellent idea."

Tad soon had a blazing fire going. In the meantime, Stacy had hastened to fill the kettle, while Vaughn got out the edibles, the others busying themselves in setting the table, which

in this instance was a blanket stretched over four stakes driven into the ground, with saplings for stringers, and over which the blanket was stretched taut.

None of these arrangements escaped the keen eyes of Tad Butler. Soon the odor of boiling coffee and frying bacon was in the air, and though the campers had had their breakfast only an hour or so before, each began to sniff the air appreciatively.

"Smells good, doesn't it?" grinned Stacy. "Sort of gives me an appetite, too."

"I don't think you need an odor to give you an appetite, unless you have changed a great deal since I saw you last," answered Tad Butler with a laugh.

All were soon gathered about the table, and though the forenoon was not yet half ended, each seemed to possess a midday appetite. Tad told them about the trip from Chillicothe, which had been uneventful, then made them tell him all about their experiences since they left home. Cale Vaughn found so much amusement in the conversation that every little while he forgot to eat. Stacy always reminded him that he wasn't doing his duty by the food.

"Do we move to-day?" asked Tad.

"We are waiting for the Indian," said the guide.

"The who?" wondered Tad.

"Oh, a fellow with two handles to his name, but without any name to nail them to," answered Stacy.

"He means Charlie John," explained Ned.

"Charlie John? That *is* a funny name," smiled Butler.

"It might be handy, too. In case you woke up and wanted to say something to him in a hurry, it wouldn't make any difference whether you called him John Charlie or Charlie John or just plain Charlie or just plain John," said Chunky. "Handy kind of a name, isn't it?"

Tad agreed that it was, especially for lazy folks, to which Ned and Walter also agreed most heartily.

"When is this man with the double-back-action name expected?" asked Tad.

"Oh, to-day sometime," replied Vaughn. "To-day with Charlie means any time between midnight last night and midnight to-night, so we might as well make up our minds to remain here until to-morrow. We shall get an early start in the morning and make a good bit of a hike to-morrow, and we'll be in the woods some time to-morrow."

"Over yonder?" asked Tad, nodding toward the dark blue ridge on the horizon. "How far is it?"

"About twenty miles as the crow flies."

"Or the hawk flops," added the fat boy, who, by this time, under the influence of the hot sun and the hotter victuals, was perspiring freely.

Tad regarded Stacy quizzically.

"Chunky, you look like a steamed pudding," he laughed.

"Yes, an underdone one," suggested Ned.

"That may be," agreed Stacy solemnly. "But I can keep on baking till I am done, while you are so tough on the outside that the inside of you never would get done."

"Ned, I guess that one reached the spot," chuckled Walter.

"Never touched me," grinned Rector.

"There! What did I tell you?" demanded Stacy triumphantly. "His outside shell is so thick that you couldn't break through it with a mall."

"Did Father send any word to me?" asked Walter, for the time being putting an end to the argument.

"Oh, yes, I forgot. I have a letter for you in my pocket," replied Tad, flushing. "How careless of me."

"Had I done that you fellows wouldn't have stopped talking about it for a month," complained Stacy.

Walter Perkins was too deeply engrossed in

his letter to give heed, but after he had read it through he read the letter aloud to his companions.

"You haven't any letters for me secreted about your person, have you, Tad?" questioned Chunky humbly.

"No; that is the only letter I have, or had," answered Tad.

"Chunky, perhaps you will get yours in the next mail," suggested Ned.

"Yes; I expect that it will come by the airplane route, but I hope it isn't a package. It might hit someone when it fell."

"You wouldn't object were it a package of food, would you?" questioned Tad teasingly.

"Well, that might make a difference," agreed Stacy. "In that event perhaps I could stand having it land on my head."

Tad, during the afternoon, got better acquainted with Cale Vaughn. He found the guide to be a well-read and intelligent man, different from the type of guide that the Pony Rider Boys had known on their previous summer outings in the saddle. Cale was less taciturn, too, and seemed to take the keenest possible delight in the jokes and pranks of the boys that he was to guide through the Maine wilderness.

Vaughn was not much of a horseman, and

he had brought a pony along, not because he expected to ride much, but because he needed something to carry his pack. When Cale was looking over Tad's pony, "Silver Face," the boy discovered that the man knew little about horses, though Tad was too polite to mention the fact.

That evening they gathered about the campfire with all hands relating experiences. Stacy Brown recounted, for Cale's benefit, how he had hunted lion in the Grand Canyon; how he had fought a battle single-handed and won. The fat boy went over the story three times, each time enlarging upon it, Cale observing him with a good-natured smile, but making no comment. He was forming his estimate of Stacy, though Brown was unaware of the fact.

It was late when they finally turned in, and still no Charlie John had arrived. Cale sat up to wait for him, and the Indian came in with his pack at five minutes before midnight.

"Where put um?" asked the half-breed.

"Over there," answered Cale carelessly, with a wave of the hand.

The Indian's pack weighed some seventy-five pounds. It looked like a laundry bag. The instant he flung the pack down there came a yell, a series of wild howls that brought every member of the camp to his feet.

Groans and moans from under the Indian's pack attracted their attention to that point. At the first yell, Cale sprang forward and began pulling off the pack.

"You lummox!" he fumed, giving the Indian a menacing glance.

CHAPTER IV

BAITING THE HONEY BEES

THE Indian had dumped his seventy-five pound pack on the sleeping Chunky. Chunky's howls grew more lusty as the pack was jerked from his body.

"Are you hurt?" begged Cale.

"I'm killed! I'm killed!"

"You are pretty noisy for a dead man. Let's see how badly you are hurt."

"That tree fell right—right across me."

"It wasn't a tree. Charlie John dropped his pack on you," the guide informed him.

"He did, eh?" cried Stacy, sitting up.

"Yes, but he didn't see you. You were lying here in the shadow. Perhaps I am the one to blame. I told him to drop his pack over here, not thinking that you were there."

"Why don't you folks finish me in a decent way, if you are so anxious to get rid of me?" demanded the fat boy, dropping over on his back and commencing to moan again.

"Here you, stop that nonsense!" commanded Tad Butler, grabbing Stacy and jerking him to

his feet. "Any fellow who can raise a rumpus like that isn't hurt at all. So this is Charlie John, is it?"

"This is the man," nodded the guide.

Tad shook hands with the Indian, who grunted his acknowledgment. The others made themselves known to the half-breed and after a time the camp settled down to quietness, Chunky disturbing the quiet at intervals by a groan, for he really had sustained a severe jolt.

The next morning they were up at daylight. After an early breakfast the party set out for the dark blue ridge in the distance, and after an uneventful day they made camp at the foot of Old Bald Mountain. They had reached the forest. The tall spruce trees were sighing overhead, the odor of pine was strong in their nostrils, and the bracing air put new life into every one of the party.

At supper that night Tad chanced to mention that he had been stung by a bee just before they made camp. Cale was interested at once. He asked where this had occurred. Tad told him.

"We shall have some honey in the morning," said the guide with a smile.

"How will you find it?" asked the Professor.

"I will lure the bees. I will show you after

supper. You lead me to the place where you got the sting."

This Tad did, the boys following, full of interest. Vaughn eyed the trees about them with keen glances.

"I guess we shall have to set a trap for them," he decided, drawing a small vial from a receptacle in his belt. Shaking the bottle well he drew the cork and touched it against the trunk of a tree, after which he corked the bottle and replaced it.

"What is that stuff?" asked the Professor.

"Oil of anise."

"What does it do?"

"Calls the bees. If there are any about here you will see them in the morning. It will call bears and several other animals, too," smiled the guide.

"Will this call the bears?" urged Stacy.

"No, I haven't used enough of it. Besides, there are no bears down here. We may find bear after we have got deeper into the woods. It is bees we are after at the present moment."

The boys marveled greatly at this. They had never heard of this use for oil of anise, and they were full of curiosity as to the outcome of the experiment.

At daybreak, on the following morning, Vaughn awakened the boys.

"Time to look for bees," he said. "Charlie, you get breakfast while we are away. Make some biscuit or cakes. You know how, don't you?"

"Me know."

Cale got his rope—not a lasso, but a rope about seven feet long and very limber. Thus equipped, all hands started out, Vaughn in the lead, his glances everywhere.

"Ou—ouch!" howled Chunky. "I'm stung! I'm stung!"

"That's good," cried the guide. "There he is!"

"Good? Good?" moaned the fat boy, dancing about holding his nose, the part that had been touched by the stinger of a bee.

"I meant the bee, not the sting," hastily explained the guide.

"There are more of them," called Tad. "My, they're all here, aren't they?"

"Watch them, boys. We must find out what direction they take after they leave here."

"There goes one to the left," cried Ned.

Cale started on a run. He halted a few paces from the tree.

"Spread out over the place. If any of you sees a bee, call to me. They don't live far from here. I can tell by the way they act. Here come more of them."

The guide appeared to have the eyes of a hawk. He could see a bee where the others were able to discover nothing at all. Cale followed the trail like a hound, except that his nose and eyes were in the air instead of on the ground.

Vaughn, after running some fifteen or twenty rods, dodging trees, leaping rocks and fallen trunks, came to a sudden halt. The rest of the party was floundering some distance in his rear.

"I think we are close to it now. Use your eyes. Look for a hole in a tree or a crotch that looks as if it might hold a bees' nest. This looks to me like a bee tree," he announced.

The guide unslung his rope, and, taking off his boots, passed the rope about the trunk of the tree, holding the free ends in his hands, and leaning well back he began to climb. This was accomplished by frequently hitching the rope up, then taking a step upward.

The boys watched his ascent with fascinated eyes. They had never seen anything like this. Vaughn was as agile as a cat.

"I believe I could do that," declared Chunky.

"Try it," urged the boys.

The fat boy did. After several attempts he succeeded in walking up the trunk of a tree for fully ten feet. Chunky grinned down at them

jeeringly. "You fellows are not so smart as you think you are, eh? Why, with a little practice I believe I could walk on a ceiling with my head down. I'd be the human fly, then, wouldn't I? I— Yeow! I'm falling!"

The fat boy had leaned forward, forgetting in his enthusiasm that he must throw his full weight on the rope by leaning backward. Of course the rope slipped, and down came Stacy.

Tad sprang forward to catch him. He only partially succeeded. Stacy struck the ground and rolled off, howling lustily, while Tad Butler went sprawling on his back. To add to the fat boy's discomfiture two bees struck him under the right eye, bringing from the lad fresh howls of pain. By this time, Cale had reached the part of the tree where he believed the bees' store of honey might be found. There was nothing there. Tad had turned his attention to the tree that Chunky tried to climb. About twenty-five feet up he had made out a broad crotch, and as a ray of light from the rising sun shot across the crotch the boy thought he saw some bees dart out. At least he was sure he had seen several dark streaks cross the bar of light.

"I think they are up this tree, Mr. Vaughn. Shall I try it?"

"No, you may get stung and fall down. I will be there in a minute."

The guide descended much faster than he had gone up. Reaching the ground, he eyed the tree critically, then shinned up it with somewhat more speed than he had climbed in the first instance.

"This is the bee tree," he called down before he got to the crotch. Cale then hastily got down, covered his face with a head protector of netting, put on his gloves, then went up again. No sooner had he reached the crotch than a black swarm enveloped his head and body. The infuriated bees were attacking him from all sides.

"Anything there?" called Tad.

"I should say there is! I won't take it all."

"How are you going to get the honey down?" asked Ned.

"I will pass it down to you. I have a long rope with me."

Wrapping several combs of honey in a second piece of netting, which he fastened to the end of his rope, the guide lowered it to the waiting hands of the Pony Rider Boys. It was a sticky mess. Stacy Brown was so full of anticipation that he forgot his stings for the moment, and his were the first hands to reach the bundle. As he grasped it, Stacy uttered a piercing scream and clapped both hands to his eyes. His head was covered with the angry bees, and

they were peppering every exposed part of his face.

"Oh, wow!" howled the fat boy, starting away on a run. He fell over a log and went rolling and groveling in the brush and dead leaves.

"Have you anything that will help him, Professor?" asked Tad. "I guess he has been pretty badly stung."

"Yes, there's some ammonia in my kit at the camp. I'll take him back."

"Let me do it, Professor," offered Ned.

"Very good."

Ned hastened to the suffering Chunky and, assisting him up, led the boy back to the camp. Ned found the ammonia, but by this time the fat boy's eyes were swollen almost shut. In applying the ammonia, Rector accidentally held the mouth of the bottle under the patient's nose. Chunky took a deep breath.

The fat boy's howls called the others to camp on the run.

"He—he did it on purpose," wailed Stacy as they came running to the scene demanding to know what fresh disaster had befallen Chunky.

"I didn't do it on purpose," protested Ned indignantly. "I was trying to help him. It isn't my fault that he took a smell of the stuff.

I was nearly strangled by it myself. That is what I get for trying to be a good fellow. You doctor yourself."

"Let me attend to him," said the Professor, getting down on his knees to examine the swollen face. "You did get stung, didn't you?"

"Strange none of the rest of us was stung," wondered Walter.

"They must have known that Chunky was the easy mark," grinned Ned. "But I am sorry for you, Chunky. I would rather have been stung myself."

"I wish you had been," moaned the fat boy. "It would have served you right."

"That will do," rebuked the Professor.

"Did you get any honey?" stammered the suffering Chunky.

"About twenty-five pounds of it," answered Vaughn triumphantly, coming up at this juncture, bearing his prize into camp.

"Give me some of it!" cried Stacy.

"Yes, give the poor child a taste," begged Ned. "It may lead him to forget his troubles, and incidentally give us a rest from his howls."

A liberal chunk was broken off and handed to Stacy, who sat up instantly and began munching it contentedly, peering out through the narrow slits between lids that were swollen almost shut.

"Be careful," warned Tad. "There may be a bee in the comb."

"I'll eat it if there is," mumbled Stacy. "It's good."

"We can see that," grinned Ned.

After making away with this piece, Stacy demanded more. To keep him quiet they gave the fat boy another chunk. Breakfast was about ready to serve when Stacy again woke the echoes with his howls. This time there was a new note in his tone. Instead of holding his hands to his face, Stacy was holding his stomach, groaning dismally, moaning and rolling over and over.

"For goodness' sake, what is the matter with that boy now?" demanded Walter.

"He is crying for more honey," scoffed Ned.

"Fat boy git pain under belt," volunteered Charlie John.

The boys looked at each other and burst out laughing.

"I was waiting for that," nodded Cale.

"For what?" questioned Tad.

"For the report. Any fellow who can eat a pound of rich honey before breakfast is entitled to have a stomach ache a yard wide. Give him a cup of hot coffee."

"Wait, I will fix him up," said the Professor. In a moment he was forcing a draught between

the unwilling lips of the fat boy. It was a hot dose, too, and it brought fresh moans from Stacy, but it had its effect, and in a few minutes Stacy was able to sit up and take interest in the breakfast that was now being served.

"Give—give me some honey," begged Chunky.

"I think you have had enough for the present," warned Vaughn.

"I want some honey," insisted the fat boy.

"No more honey to-day," answered the Professor incisively. "Stacy, what are we going to do with you?"

"Give me honey."

"We can't be bothered with you in this way. You will have to exercise better judgment, or I shall be forced to send you home. We are out for an enjoyable trip, not to carry along an indiscreet young man like yourself," warned Professor Zepplin.

"I—I can't help it if I get stung, can I?" muttered Chunky.

"No, but you need not permit your eyes to get bigger than your stomach."

"Bigger than my stomach? Why—I can't see out of my eyes now. Bigger than my stomach? Pshaw!"

"We will drop the subject for the present," decided the Professor sharply, whereat Stacy

subsided for the time being. Owing to the lad's condition, however, the party concluded not to start on until later in the day, Mr. Vaughn offering to give the others some instruction in woodcraft to fill up the time from then until the afternoon. Professor Zepplin treated the bee stings, Stacy taking a certain sense of pride in his condition because it made him feel that he was a sort of martyr.

The honey was delicious, and the boys ate too much of it, but none would admit that he suffered any ill effects. Poor Chunky did not get another taste all the rest of the day. Yet the fat boy, while nursing his stings, was planning something that would fill the camp of the Pony Rider Boys with excitement and give them a thrill that would last them for some days.

CHAPTER V

NEW TRICKS IN WOODCRAFT

"CAMP MAKING is a science," said Cale Vaughn that night, after they had selected a suitable site for their night's lodging. "In the woods you should first clear the site of brush and all dead leaves, for the danger of fire is very great in these big timber tracts. Just a little carelessness might do a million dollars' worth of damage. If you have to burn off the rubbish, do so in small spots at a time, then backfire toward the center. Be extremely careful about this. While one is unpacking, the others will be engaged in cutting poles for the tents, getting the food ready, each man having his task to perform. I don't need to advise you on that point. You boys can beat me in pitching a camp. You could give points to a circus man, I really believe. In case your ground is too rocky to permit driving in stakes, you may erect two tripods at a convenient distance apart on which to place the ridge pole. If you have no ridge pole use a rope instead."

"That is a good idea. I never thought of it," nodded Butler.

"In this way you can make a self-supporting framework without driving a single stick into the ground. Then comes your bed. How would you go to work to make a browse-bed, Master Tad?"

"Either stick the pine or cedar stems into the ground until they will hold you up, or pile the browse in until you have enough to lie on," answered Tad.

"That will do very well, but the woodsman likes to take a little more pains, especially if he is going to remain in camp for a few days, as we shall do."

"We are ready to learn," nodded Rector.

"Then I will explain. First smooth the ground, leaving no stones, stubs or hummocks. Cut head and foot logs a foot thick, and side logs which may be somewhat smaller. Pin them down with inverted crotches, making a rectangular framework on the ground to keep the browse in place. Do you get me?"

"Yes, yes," answered the boys.

"I never knew how to make my bed so it wouldn't slip out from under me in the night," laughed Tad. "In the morning I usually find myself lying on the bare ground, no matter how carefully I have made my bed."

"So I have observed," smiled the guide. "We will have Charlie do this work hereafter, but it might be a good idea for you boys to help in order to get your hands in. There will be many times when you will have to do it for yourselves."

"We have had to do so many times already," muttered Walter.

"To continue with our subject, next fell a thriving balsam or hemlock—spruce, pine or cedar will do if you can get nothing else—and strip off the fans."

The boys drew closer, for they were learning something that was of no little interest to them.

"Place a course of boughs a foot long against the head-log, butts down and to the front, then shingle another layer in front of these and continue in that way down to the foot of the bed, leaving only the tips of the boughs showing."

"That is something like my way of making the browse-bed," said Tad.

"Yes, except that yours is a heap of greens, not a bed," answered the guide.

Tad agreed to this with a nod.

"New greens should be put in every day to freshen your bed and keep it soft."

"It strikes me that a bed of that sort means a lot of work," observed Rector.

"I could sleep myself to death on that kind of couch," mused Stacy.

"You can do that all right on the hard ground," answered Butler. "Ever hear Stacy snore, Mr. Vaughn?"

"I have not had that pleasure."

"Oh, it won't be any pleasure. Take my word for that," asserted Ned.

"No, you will think a troop of trained sea lions have broken loose and strayed out in the woods. Never heard anything like it in my life," said Tad.

"Outside of a zoölogical garden, Tad," added Ned.

"Having finished this," resumed the guide, "we come to the question of caring for the food. I presume you have lost grub now and then?"

"Principally through the medium of Stacy Brown's mouth," answered Ned.

"Hang your salt pork or bacon to a tree beside the fireplace where it will be handy. If you are in a country where there are thieving varmints, suspend the stuff from a wire or cord secured to two trees sheltering the stuff from sun and rain. If you have packs, pile them neatly together, covering them with canvas; or, in the event of not having any of the latter,

make a thatch roof of boughs. Protect your saddles and trappings in the same way, making sure that the lash ropes cannot get wet and shrink. Have everything where you know where to find it in the darkest night and where it will not be overlooked when you break camp."

"I see we have a lot to learn," said Tad.

"Yes, we've been thinking we knew it all," agreed Chunky.

"For a more permanent camp, of course you would go more into detail."

"Please explain," urged Tad.

"Yes, tell us everything. We shall probably decide to live in the woods one of these days," added Rector.

Stacy shook his head slowly.

"I don't think I want to go into permanent camp, if there's any more work about it than we have to do already."

"There is considerably more," smiled Cale. "You know how to make a dining table. I have shown you that already. You will want to make a kitchen table in the same way, using sticks, as you will have no boards. Dig a sink hole into which to throw your refuse, sprinkling ashes or dirt over the stuff every day, otherwise you will be pestered with flies. If you have a spring handy it will be a good place in

which to keep fresh meat, such as venison. The outside of the meat will come out white and stringy, but the inside of it will keep fresh and sweet for weeks, provided no bears come nosing around after the stuff."

"I am afraid such a plant would not last long in these woods," said Tad.

"Not long," agreed the guide. "However, there is a simple way to scare off the animals. All you have to do is to tie a white rag to a stick directly over this cache. It will cause them to keep a safe distance away ordinarily. Speaking of caching or storing food for future use, there are several ways of doing this. My usual way is to suspend the stuff from a wire strung between trees, high enough to be out of the reach of any prowling animals. Be sure to peel the bark from the trees to which your line is fastened. That will prevent the animals from climbing the tree."

"What do you think of it, boys?" asked Tad, glancing at his companions.

"I never thought there was so much to it," answered Rector.

"Oh, I haven't begun yet," laughed Vaughn.

"Please, please don't begin, then, if you are going to put all this into practice. I want to get some fun out of this trip, not make a slave of myself," begged Stacy amid a general laugh.

"I think you boys have had enough instruction for one day. Perhaps I am telling you some things that you know already?"

"No, no; go on," begged the boys.

"Yes, go on, I can stand it to hear about it, if I don't have to do any of the work," nodded Chunky solemnly.

"Let's see. Well, suppose I talk to you about campfires. Come over by the fire and sit down. Our friend, Master Stacy, is weary after his bee experience, and I don't know that I blame him," said Vaughn with a merry twinkle in his eyes.

"I'll warrant he isn't half as tired as the bees that stung him. They surely will have contracted the hook-worm disease," declared Ned.

"Now we are ready to hear about the campfire," reminded Tad, after they had seated themselves. The Professor, who had been reading, laid down his book to listen.

"As you know from sad experience, some green woods will not burn," began the guide. "Leaving aside the woods that will not burn, I'll mention some of those that will do good service when green. Hickory is the best of all. It makes a hot fire, lasts a long time, and burns down to a bed of coals that will keep up an even heat for hours. Next in value are the

chestnut, oak and dogwood. Black birch is excellent, too, doing its own blowing."

"Blowing?" questioned the Professor.

"Yes, sir. That means that the oil in the birch assists its combustion, so that the wood needs no coaxing to make it burn. Sugar maple is good, too, but it is too valuable a tree to waste. Locust and mulberry are good fuel. Now white ash makes one of the first-class campfire fuels. It is easy to cut and tote and catches fire readily."

"What about kindling?" interjected Tad.

"Yes, kindling," urged Stacy. "I've burned up half of my old shirts trying to start fires."

"The birch bark is one of the best," answered the guide. "Besides, it makes good torches. It is full of resinous oil, blazes up at once, will burn in any wind, and even wet sticks may be kindled with it."

"That's new," nodded Butler.

"Stacy, there's your job. You won't have to sacrifice any more shirts in trying to start a campfire," said Ned. "Your job, from now on, is peeling birch bark for kindling."

"Pitch pine, of course, affords the best knots," continued Cale. "Splits from a stump whose outside has been burned are rich in resin. Don't pick up sticks from the ground, but rather those from the down wood. Ordinarily you will

find fine dry wood in a tree that has been shivered by lightning."

"Br-r-r!" shivered the fat boy.

"To get to our subject—fire—you must remember that more necessary than kindling or firewood is air. What I mean is, don't jumble your fuel together any old way, but build up a systematic structure so the air can draw under it and upward through the pile."

"That's why my shirts wouldn't burn," interrupted the fat boy. "I jammed them down in the pile of wood just as I'd ram a wad into a muzzle-loading gun."

"Just like you," affirmed Rector.

"Lay two good-sized sticks on the ground for a foundation to begin with. Across them at right angles place a few dry twigs or splinters so they do not quite touch. On these, one at each side, lay your paper or bark, then on top of this put two other cross sticks, smaller than the bed sticks; over this a cross layer of larger twigs just as you would build a cob house, but gradually increasing the size of the sticks as you work up toward the top of your house. You try that and see if you don't have a roaring fire in a minute after you apply the match. We will build one, or rather you boys may, when we get into our camp to-morrow."

"Great!" agreed the boys.

"There are numerous methods, such as 'trapper's fire,' 'hunter's fire,' 'Indian's fire,' and the like. I will tell you about them at some other time. You will get them all jumbled into one if I tell you now. I will add that, for warmth, you should build a low fire. If you build up a big, roaring fire you can't get near it. The low fire enables you to hover over it. That's an Indian trick. I could go on talking about fires from now until to-morrow morning, but the best way is to take these up one by one and learn them by actual experience. That we will do as we go along. You boys are fine woodsmen already, but like all the rest of us, you still have some things to learn. I am going to teach you all I know, and if you will watch Charlie John you may be able to get some points from him."

"Most interesting indeed," agreed the Professor.

"The first rainy day we have I will show you how to build a fire in quick time when everything is soaked. To-morrow we will put some of our theories regarding camp-making and fire-building into practice. Just now it's time for our chuck and then some stories over the evening fire," concluded the guide.

CHAPTER VI

THE FAT BOY'S REVENGE

THE Pony Rider Boys had never had so interesting a guide as Cale Vaughn proved himself to be. He always had something new to explain to them, and his explanations were put in a most attractive form.

It was late that night when the boys turned in, and early on the following morning they were on their way to the next camping place where they might remain for a few days, taking short exploration trips from that central base.

This day's riding was the hardest of all they ever had experienced. It is true they followed a small watercourse, but the going was terrific. Not only did the trees stand so close together as to make riding a terror, but saplings and thick underbrush, together with occasional rocks, hidden fallen trunks, and other obstacles, made traveling a perilous proceeding. There was danger to the boys, and there was danger of the ponies breaking their legs. To add to their troubles, the mosquitoes got busy quite early in the forenoon, and smacks of open

palms against irritated cheeks were heard on all sides.

Stacy Brown's red face was the most conspicuous thing in the outfit. Cale Vaughn walked and led his horse, as did some of the others, but Stacy refused to walk so long as he had a horse that would hold him up. As a result, the fat boy suffered more than all the others. The Indian, having been told where they would make camp, had shouldered his pack and strode off through the forest, soon disappearing under the giant trees of the Maine wilderness.

Ponies were irritable and rebellious by the time the party halted for the noonday rest and luncheon. The boys by this time did not know where they were. Tad knew that the guide was laying his course by the little stream which came into view now and then, but the lad saw no signs of a trail. He was glad his was not the responsibility of finding the way for the party, for this was surely a primeval forest.

"Some woods, eh?" was Stacy Brown's way of describing it. "A fine place to hide, in case someone were after us," he added.

"In that event we shouldn't be looking for a hiding place, young man!"

"Maybe you wouldn't," retorted Stacy.

"Nor would you. You are simply talking to make conversation," answered Tad.

The argument was ended by the voice of the guide ordering the party to be on the move again. Cale knew that they would have to make time in order to reach before dark the place he had decided upon for the night's camp. The Indian, no doubt, was already there. So the boys tore their way through the thickets, here and there making wide detours to avoid an unusually rough piece of going. Twilight was upon them ere they halted to make camp in a dense thicket of spruce, the tops of which they could not see in the faint light, but later on the moon came up, silvering the tops of the pines. With it came the voices of the night, the voices of the deep forest. Birds twittered here and there, a crow croaked hoarsely in a tree near at hand, and something went scudding away from the outskirts of the camp as Cale shied a stone in that direction. He was the only one who had heard anything at that point.

Suddenly there came the sound of what appeared to be human beings talking in low tones. The boys started up, looking first at each other, then at the guide. Vaughn lay before the fire, his head supported by his arms. He was undisturbed. It was all too familiar to him, who had spent so many hundred nights in this same impenetrable forest.

"Wha—what was that?" stammered Chunky.

"Didn't you hear someone talking, Mr. Vaughn?" asked Tad.

The guide twisted his head from side to side two times.

"Didn't you hear it?" insisted Ned.

"I heard several things," answered Cale.

"Yes, so did I," spoke up the Professor. "I am quite sure it was persons speaking."

"There it goes again," cried Tad.

"Didn't you boys ever hear that before?" smiled Cale.

The lads confessed that they never had.

"Why, that is the 'coons talking to each other."

"The 'coons?" exclaimed Chunky, opening his eyes wide. "This is a funny place for 'coons up in this wilderness. What do they live on?"

"They browse for a living. I mean the four-legged kind. Animals!"

"Oh! I thought you meant—"

"Is it possible that that noise is made by 'coons?" interrupted Professor Zepplin.

Cale nodded.

"Yes; they are conversational little gentlemen. Probably are trying to decide upon the best way of getting a meal out of our camp. Boys, to-morrow morning we shall have to busy

ourselves at daylight. We are going to have a lesson in permanent camp building, you know."

"Yes, sir," chorused the lads.

"Afterward, if you are agreeable, we will take a tramp over the mountain to a place where a ranger friend of mine lives."

"Rangers?" questioned Stacy. "I didn't know they had Texas Rangers in Maine."

"Stacy, you are silly," rebuked Tad.

"Nor do they," answered the guide. "The kind I speak of is a forest ranger."

"What do they range?" asked Walter.

"The forest," answered Rector. "That's all there is to range up here."

"The forest rangers watch the forests," explained Vaughn. "It is their business to see that no timber is cut unlawfully and to watch out for fires and warn campers and hunters to be careful. It is a fine life."

"I should think it would be," agreed the fat boy. "But better for them than for me, with the talking 'coons and other things that you can hear but don't see. I'll get another ghost scare if this keeps on. I wish it were morning."

"Morning will come soon enough," answered the guide.

Morning did. With it came work, and plenty of it. Vaughn let the boys do the work of mak-

ing permanent camp, he instructing them in the work as they went along, applying some of the theories he had expounded to them on the previous day.

"Woodcraft, boys," explained the guide, "is, as perhaps you may know, the art of getting along in the wilderness with just what Nature has placed within your reach. When you are able to find your way through an uncharted wilderness like this one, when you know the trees and the plants, the animal life, when you know how to live comfortably, then you may call yourselves good woodsmen. I might say that there are few of them in this day and age. And as a matter of fact, there are not very many places in America where woodcraft is called for. This is one of the places where it is needed unless you expect to get lost and starve to death. From what I have seen of you boys I should say you might easily get lost, but you all possess natural resourcefulness. You would manage to live and keep going, though you might have a hard time of it."

By eight o'clock the immediate work was finished. Cale announced that they would start off for a hike, as he had suggested the day before. When Stacy learned that they were going to walk, and that they would tramp ten or fifteen miles before they returned, he balked.

"Not for me!" announced the fat boy firmly, sitting down on a lichen-covered rock. "This cold rock shall jump out of his pit sooner than I, and don't you forget that for a moment!"

"Oh, come along," begged Tad.

"No, sir. I'll ride, if the rest do."

"You can't ride where we are going," replied Cale.

"Then I don't go."

No amount of urging would induce the lad to change his mind, so they decided to go on without him. Charlie John would be in the camp all day, so Cale said it would be all right for Chunky to remain. He warned the half-breed to see to it that Master Stacy did not stray from camp, knowing full well that the fat boy would lose himself were he to get ten rods from the camp.

Stacy did. Not once, but six times before noon did he lose himself. Fortunately he had not strayed far. His yells reached the ears of the Indian, who, with many grunts of disapproval, stalked out and brought the lost boy back to camp, sternly ordering him to remain there. But Chunky was stubborn. He was determined to go out and back freely and try to find his way. That was why he became lost so many times. The noonday meal was the only thing that caused him to change his mind.

After dinner, while Charlie John was washing the dishes and stowing the food, Stacy began rummaging about the camp.

All too soon this occupation proved uninteresting to one who possessed Chunky's energy in finding useless things to do with all his might.

"Even sleeping will be more fun," decided the fat boy. So he vanished behind the flap of his tent and lay down. His snoring, however, soon proved altogether too much for even the placid nerves of an Indian to endure. Charlie John stole in soft-footed, shaking the youngster, then drawing him to his feet.

"What are you trying to do to me?" indignantly demanded Chunky.

"Too much saw-mill noise—no good," declared the Indian. "Make that noise again, then me show you something Indians do to stop noise."

Stolidly Charlie John departed from the tent, but there was nothing stolid about the fat boy's quivering rage.

"If Mr. Copper Face can't let me alone, I'll make him wish he had," growled Stacy, shaking angry fists at the retreating Indian.

In his rummaging about the camp young Brown had discovered a ten-ounce bottle of anise-seed oil, and as Chunky now gazed at

this bottle the light of new mischief began to dawn in his eyes. Charlie John would have done well to watch him.

"Heap big fun!" muttered the fat boy, choking down too visible evidences of glee. "I'll scatter this around the camp and bring a million-billion bees here. Then I'll hide in my tent, and, as the bees won't know where to find me, they'll devote all their time to Charlie. When he gets it too bad I'll holler to him to come into the tent and hear me snore. Wow!"

In a short time, while the Indian was at a little distance, Stacy had sprinkled considerable of the oil on the ground. Charlie John, returning, sniffed suspiciously, but Chunky had the bottle out of sight. Charlie, however, had a keen nose, so he watched in silence.

Stacy's innocent face betrayed nothing, and the boy kept on sprinkling a ring of oil clear around the camp. He was chuckling to himself all the time, congratulating himself on the happy idea that had come to him with the finding of the anise oil. Stacy was confident that he was going to have the time of his life.

In this the fat boy was right, though he did not realize fully to just what that fun would lead. Had he realized, no doubt he would have replaced the stopper in the oil bottle without the loss of a second.

The buzzing of a bee recalled him to the peril of his position. The buzz was very business-like, too. Stacy made a vicious strike at the sound, then dived for the protection of his tent. Reaching that, he jerked the flap shut and peered out, red-faced, big-eyed.

Charlie John, who had been bending over a garbage hole that he had just dug, suddenly leaped straight up into the air, clapping a hand to the back of his neck. A busy bee had momentarily alighted there, and, before leaving, the bee had pricked the tough hide of the half-breed.

Ere Charlie had recovered from his surprise he got another sting. Stacy was about to yell again, but catching a glimpse of the Indian's face, convulsed with anger, Stacy quickly withdrew into the tent, prudently closing the flap and tying it on the inside. The boy then sat down and, with arms clasped about his knees, rocked back and forth, fairly choking with laughter. He could hear the Indian thrashing about on the outside. The sound was sweet music to the ears of the fat boy. Then a new sound was heard. It was a yell, and the yell was pitched in a new key. Stacy stepped out to see what was going on, then he, too, uttered a yell, louder and more piercing than that of the Indian.

CHAPTER VII

STAMPEDED BY AN INTRUDER

THE sight that had so affected Stacy Brown was that of a black bear nosing about the camp. The animal was apparently following the anise oil trail that Stacy had laid with such care.

The fat boy watched with fascinated eyes for a moment. But, as the bear turned its attention to the camp, Stacy beat a hasty retreat into the tent. Once inside and the flap pulled shut he made bold to peer out. He saw Charlie John calmly sitting astride the crotch of a tree some ten feet from the ground. The Indian did not seem to be worrying. No bears would be likely to reach him up there unless, perhaps, Mr. Bruin decided to climb the tree, which he would not do so long as there remained anything of interest in the camp below.

Stacy ducked back as he saw the animal heading in his direction. The lad waited, fully expecting to see the pointed, inquisitive nose poked through the tent opening. But, no bear coming, Stacy again crept to the front on hands

and knees, and, pulling the flap back slightly, peered out. Something cold and chilling poked him in the face.

It was Mr. Bruin's nose. With an unearthly yell, the fat boy leaped back and sprang to the rear of the tent. He turned just in time to see the bear ambling in.

Stacy whipped out his hunting knife, slitting the canvas at the rear, and made a run for the nearest tree, which proved to be a sapling. He started to climb it, then changing his mind grabbed up a rope and shinned up the tree occupied by Charlie. Charlie helped him up, panting.

"Fat boy much big fool," grunted the Indian.

"See here, don't you say that again," threatened Chunky angrily. "Why didn't you stay down there and fight him?"

"No gun, no fight."

"No, I see not," answered the boy dryly. "That's what's the matter with me. I didn't have a gun. Did you see him come into my tent? There he goes. Now what's he up to?"

"Him eat plenty butter."

Him did. The bear ate two pounds of butter that he had pawed from the table. The animal licked his chops and looked for more. Fortunately the rest of the butter was suspended

from a wire strung between two trees out of reach. The animal tried to get at this, failing in which it squatted down at the base of the tree where the half-breed and the boy were seeking security.

"He's going to keep us here all the rest of the day," groaned Chunky.

The Indian broke off a piece of limb and taking careful aim threw it at the bear. It smote Mr. Bruin on the point of his tender nose. The bear uttered a snarl and a growl, then began to rub his paws over the smarting nose. He danced about very much as had Stacy Brown when stung by the bees, and the fat boy shouted with glee. He shouted louder when the animal suddenly wheeled about on its haunches and began ambling from the camp.

"Me fix um," grinned the Indian, sliding to the ground.

"You certainly did give him the run," agreed Chunky. "Will he come back?" Stacy was still prudently sitting astride the limb.

"Him no come back."

"Good. I wish he had taken a slice out of you while he was here," added the lad under his breath.

"Come down. Him no come back."

"Thank you, I will, seeing that you put it that way," answered Chunky, descending from

the tree. "We know how to give bears the run, don't we, John Charles?"

"Huh! Much fool!" grunted the Indian. "Much butter gone," he added, ruefully surveying the butter plate. "Guide him git mad."

"That won't hurt us any, John. He will be glad to know that we drove the bear off. I'll tell him what a brave thing we did. Hark!"

"White men come back," nodded John.

"How do you know?"

"Hear um."

"Yes, I hear something, too, but I don't know who or what I hear."

"Hear um. Mr. Vaughn no come 'long."

"You have sharp ears, Mr. John Charles. We'll see how good your hearing really is."

Stacy opened his eyes when, a few minutes later, all of the party came hiking into camp, with the exception of Cale Vaughn. The Indian's sharp ears had heard aright.

"Where's the guide?" demanded Chunky.

"He left us on the other side of the creek to follow out a bear track that he just picked up," answered Tad. "He will be here pretty soon."

"What, haven't you anything to eat?" called Ned.

"Not time yet. Besides, Johnnie Charles and Brown Stacy have been busy most of the afternoon."

John grinned.

"You fellows chasing bear tracks, eh?"

"No. Following them," corrected Tad.

"If you want to catch bears you had better stay right here in the camp. This is the headquarters for bears as well as for Pony Rider Boys."

"What has been going on here?" asked Tad, eyeing the fat boy keenly, observing that Stacy's face was flushed and excited.

"What's been going on? I'll tell you. We had a call from a bear, a bear almost as big as my pony."

"What, bears here in camp?" exclaimed Walter apprehensively.

"Yes, bears here in camp. But I drove him off after a fierce hand-to-hand conflict in which I nearly lost my life. Yes, sir, I fought that bear right there in my tent and—and you can see the result of the fray if you will go in my tent."

"Where did you say you were when the bear was here?" interrupted Butler.

"Fat boy up tree," the half-breed informed them.

"I thought so," nodded Tad, grinning. "Well, tell us about the bear."

"Him eat butter from table, then him go way again," answered Charlie.

"I really believe there has been a bear here," pondered Ned.

"You are right there has. You go look in my tent, if you don't believe me," answered Stacy. "Yes, sir, and I slapped him right in the face when he tried to kiss me. What do you think of that?"

"Tried to kiss you?" questioned Walter.

"Yes. Stuck his cold nose right against my nose. Ugh! Didn't he, John?"

The Indian nodded, but without realizing what Stacy was saying.

"Why didn't you shoot him?" asked Butler.

"Gun in other tent," replied Charlie.

"Yes. And we don't need guns. I was going to use my trusty knife, but I didn't want to hurt the poor thing," added Chunky.

"Brave man," remarked Ned.

"I am glad I wasn't here," said Walter. "I know I should have been scared half to death. Weren't you scared, Chunky?"

"What! Me scared?" demanded the fat boy, throwing out his chest. "Did you ever hear of Stacy Brown being scared? Oh, wow! Yeow!"

"What, what, what—" shouted the Professor.

"There he is again!" yelled Stacy. "Run! Run, fellows; he's after us! Run, I tell you!"

Stacy, acting upon his own advice, was already shinning up a tree. The others were not far behind him. So sudden had been the appearance of Bruin that they had no time to think. Even Tad Butler followed the rest when the bear ambled toward him. Charlie John, at the first alarm, had made tracks for the protection of the crotch where he had sought security on the first visit of the bear.

"More bear," grunted the Indian.

"What do you mean?" called Ned.

"He means this isn't the same one," Stacy informed them.

"I thought you weren't afraid?" jeered Ned Rector.

"I'm not," protested Stacy.

"No, I see you are not. Why don't you get down and fight him, then?"

"I—I haven't got my knife," stammered the fat boy.

Tad began scrambling from the tree.

"Tad, Tad!" called the Professor.

"Yes, sir?"

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to get that bear if I can."

"Get back there!"

Tad slipped off the rope that he had bound about his waist before starting out on the hike that morning. Each one of the party had put

Tad's Rope Wriggled Out.

away his rifle upon reaching camp. Some had their hunting knives on their persons, but those were their only weapons.

The bear was now ambling about the camp, nosing into everything in sight, helping himself to such food as he was able to find, overturning packs and dishes in the search for more. Observing Tad, Mr. Bruin lurched toward the boy. Tad was struggling with his rope to get it in shape to cast.

"Run, Tad!" shouted Rector.

Tad did run, dodging here and there to gain time. In a few moments he had his rope ready, then began a hide-and-seek game between bear and boy, the Pony Rider Boy watching for an opportunity to use the rope. All at once his rope wriggled out. The big loop slipped neatly over the head of the bear and was quickly jerked taut.

Such a yell as went up from the boys in the trees! Even the Professor shouted his approval. But the bear became suddenly electrified. Rearing on his hind legs he began pawing at the leash, snarling and growling furiously. Tad meanwhile was dancing here and there, jerking on the rope, tugging and trying his best to pull his captive down to all fours. Tad might as well have sought to pull over one of the tall spruce, for the bear's strength, of

course, was far superior to that of the boy who had roped him.

Ned Rector, by this time, was scrambling from the tree. Tad was too busy to observe what his companion was doing. Ned ran for his tent, appearing a moment later with his rifle.

"Look out!" warned the Professor. "You will hit one of us."

"No, I won't. I guess I can't miss the mark so close as this."

Ned, at the first favorable opportunity, raised his rifle and, taking quick aim, fired.

The bear staggered backward, and Tad fell over flat on his back. Ned Rector had shot the rope in two close up to Mr. Bruin's head.

"Shoot again! Quick!" yelled Tad.

Instead of doing so, Rector, seeing what he had done, hurled his rifle away and made a dash for a tree, for the bear was ambling toward him, showing his teeth and growling angrily.

Tad had sprung to his feet and was looking about for the rifle when a yell from the boys up the trees caused him to glance back apprehensively. What he saw decided the lad on the instant. Three other bears, large ones, were ambling into camp, nosing about and sniffing the ground. At this juncture, in his excitement, Stacy fell out of the tree. Tad ran to

assist the fat boy up again, but Chunky needed no help. He was in more of a hurry than he ever had been in his life. This time he shinned up a sapling, the nearest tree to him.

The sapling bent under his weight; it bent perilously close to one of the bears—so close, in fact, that the fat boy's feet struck the head of the bear. The animal raised on its haunches and swung a mighty paw. The paw caught Stacy Brown, sending him rolling, tumbling and yelling over the ground.

The boys who were perched in the trees groaned. Ned began scrambling down again.

"Stay where you are!" shouted Tad.

CHAPTER VIII

AN INTERRUPTED FORAGE

YOUNG BUTLER, regardless of the presence of the bears, ran to the assistance of the unfortunate fat boy.

Tad jerked Stacy to his feet, then with a firm grip on the latter's collar ran him toward one of the larger trees, up which he assisted Chunky. The panting of a bear seemed close to Tad's ears when he had finished this task. He had just time to jump aside to avoid the sweep of a paw.

Tad jumped as far up as possible, throwing arms and legs about the trunk of the same tree. At that moment he lost a section of his trousers, which was left in the claws of Bruin. Tad quickly hitched up a few inches higher, panting from his exertions, and there he clung for a moment to get his breath. In the meantime the bear was exerting itself to reach him.

"Climb, climb! He'll get you!" shouted Ned.

"He can't reach me."

"Look out. There comes another one. He is bigger!" warned Walter.

"Grab the rope!" yelled Rector, letting the loop of his lasso drop over Tad Butler's head.

Tad hunched the rope under his arms.

"Can you hold me?"

"Yes, I've got a hitch around a limb," answered Ned.

The boy half way up the tree rested more of his weight on the rope. A moment of this and he began to climb, Ned assisting by hauling up on the rope with all his strength. Butler was soon resting beside him.

"Thank you," said Tad. "You aren't much of a shot, but you helped me up."

"Yes. I could shoot better than that with a pop-gun," jeered Stacy from an adjoining tree.

"You keep still. I don't see that you have been doing much, for a brave man, except to get us into more trouble," retorted Ned.

The Professor had become very much excited, and nearly fell out of the tree while suddenly shifting his position.

"Charlie, why don't you do something?" shouted the Professor.

Charlie hunched his shoulders.

"Get down there and shoot them, why don't you?" demanded Professor Zepplin.

"No gun, no shoot," answered Charlie John.

"Some of us can't shoot when we do have a gun," piped Chunky.

"It takes a pretty good shot to shoot a rope in two," answered Butler mischievously, stealing a look at the flushed face of Ned Rector.

"But what are we going to do?" demanded the Professor.

"From the present outlook I think we shall be tree dwellers, for a time at least," answered Tad. "Has any of you a suggestion to make?"

"I move that Ned Rector climb down and make faces at the bears. They will run away sure then."

"Oh, keep still. If they didn't run at sight of you, nothing under the skies will frighten them," retorted Ned disgustedly.

"No, they didn't run away. They wanted to kiss me," answered the fat boy triumphantly.

Despite their perilous situation the boys laughed, but Professor Zepplin did not. He sat astride a limb tugging savagely at his whiskers. Tad suggested to Ned that he was afraid the Professor would pull the whiskers out.

The report of a rifle some distance to the westward of the camp called the attention of the party sharply in that direction.

"That's Mr. Vaughn," cried Tad.

"What is he shooting at?" asked Walter.

"I don't know, but maybe he has found the bear he went out after," suggested Tad.

There was no second shot, so they concluded

that the guide had missed his shot and lost whatever he had shot at. Tad began uttering long-drawn calls, the call of the woodsman which he had learned from Cale Vaughn. After a time a faint call was heard in answer.

"He heard us," yelled Stacy.

In the meantime the three bears were having a merry time down in the camp. They even searched the tents for plunder, foraging everywhere, doing damage to everything that they did not eat, clawing the outfit over ruthlessly.

The guide's voice was heard calling again. It sounded much nearer this time, and the Pony Rider Boys raised their voices in an appealing yell.

Cale heard it. He knew instinctively that something was wrong at the camp, and started for home at a brisk run. As he neared the camp he proceeded with more caution. Every few moments the boys would set up their long-drawn calls, but as there were no more answers to them, they feared that Cale had gone away on another trail.

Suddenly a loud report that seemed to be right in the camp, so startled them that some of them nearly fell out of the trees. Chunky uttered a yell. Following the report, the most amazing thing happened to one of the bears that was standing on its hind feet pawing at the

table. The bear toppled over backwards, clawed the air as it lay flat on its back, then rolled over on its side where it lay still.

Bang!

A second bear followed the first, except that he plunged forward, rolled over, and did not move again.

The third bear, with a growl, ambled into the bushes and disappeared.

"It's the guide!" cried Tad.

"Hurrah!" yelled Ned. "Wasn't that some shooting? Oh, Mr. Vaughn!"

"Ye-o-w!" yelled Stacy in a shrill, penetrating voice.

"Whoo—ee!" cried Tad.

"You've got them," roared Walter. "One ran away. Hurry and you'll get him."

Cale, at this juncture, made a sudden appearance from a thicket of bushes, rifle thrust ahead of him ready for instant service.

"Where did he go?"

"That way," shouted Tad, slipping down the tree and bounding off in the direction taken by the third bear.

The others followed him down to the ground, while Cale ran off in pursuit of the escaping bear. Stacy Brown, constituting himself the leader of the party, was shouting directions to them.

"Oh, go way back somewhere and sit down," begged Ned.

"Go climb a tree. That's the best place for you," retorted Stacy.

"Boys, stop your quarreling," commanded the Professor.

"We aren't quarreling," answered Rector.

"No, that's just our way of having fun," agreed Stacy.

"We love each other too well to quarrel, don't we, Fatty?" questioned Rector, grinning broadly.

"Of course we do. Didn't I save your life to-day?"

"I'd like to know how," bristled Ned.

"He got away," announced Vaughn, returning to camp. "This place looks as if it had been struck by a tornado," added the guide. "What has been going on here?"

"Well, you see the big bear and the middle-sized bear and the weeny-teeny bear came home for their bowl of soup. Not finding the soup they tried to eat up the Pony Rider Boys," began Stacy.

"I don't understand it," reflected Cale. "Bears don't ordinarily act that way."

"These weren't ordinary bears. Neither was the one that kissed me this afternoon," declared Stacy.

Vaughn fixed his gaze on the fat boy.

"What are you getting at?"

"Oh, nothing much. A big, big bear called on me in my tent this afternoon. We drove him out of the camp, we did. You ought to have been here. Why, when he left the camp after I had rebuked him, his tail was dragging on the ground, and—"

"He must have been a new species of bear to have a tail as long as that," laughed Cale.

"Well, anyhow, we drove him off, put him to rout, packed him off bag and baggage. I guess he is running yet. You never saw such a scared beast in your life."

"I guess he isn't running very fast," returned Cale dryly.

"Why isn't he running?" retorted Stacy, offended at the guide's tone.

"Because I shot him about a mile the other side of the creek," answered Vaughn. "He was a small bear and he didn't appear to be very much frightened."

The boys had a good laugh at the fat boy's expense.

"That was another bear, probably the child of the one we chased," declared Stacy, not to be downed thus easily.

"Perhaps," agreed Cale. "But that doesn't explain the peculiar actions of these fellows,

nor of the first one. Charlie, how did the bears act when you first saw them?" he demanded, turning to the Indian.

"Him smell for something—so." The half-breed went through the motions of sniffing over the ground, against the trees, and toward the tents.

"Just so," nodded Vaughn. "The question is, what caused them to do that? Something here must have attracted them. Do you know what it was?"

"Not know," muttered the Indian.

"Do you know, Master Stacy?" fixing a keen gaze on the fat boy.

"How should I know?" replied Stacy indifferently.

"I didn't know but perhaps you might," returned Cale. The guide stood his rifle against a tree and walked about the camp with apparent carelessness, looking into the tents, examining the provisions through which the bears had foraged. Finally he returned to Chunky.

"How much of that oil of anise did you use to attract those bears?" he demanded sharply.

Chunky flushed to the roots of his hair.

"Why—I—I—"

"Where is the bottle?"

"I—I threw it away."

"You used all the oil?"

Stacy nodded, with eyes averted.

The boys were beginning to understand. All were grinning.

"So that was one of your tricks, eh?" asked Tad. "Well, it certainly succeeded."

"What were you trying to do?" insisted the guide. He too was now smiling.

"I—I wanted to call the bees."

"Why?"

"I—I thought maybe they'd sting the Indian."

"Did they?" asked Tad.

"They did! They pinked him right in the back of the neck, and you ought to have heard that Indian yell." Stacy was looking them in the face now, as he warmed to his subject. "John Charles jumped about fourteen and a half feet in the air and let out a war whoop. I'm surprised you folks didn't hear him."

"Where were you all this time?" interjected Rector.

"I was hiding in the tent, 'cause the bees were pretty thick, and the boss bee was scouting for me. I—I guess he must have smelled the oil on my fingers."

The Professor's fingers closed over the arm of the fat boy.

"Stacy!" he said sternly. "What do you think we ought to do with you?"

"Well," reflected the fat boy, "I reckon you ought to cook me a bear steak and give me a spread. I'm half starved."

Professor Zepplin released his hold on Chunky's arm, heaving a deep sigh of resignation.

"Perhaps that would be the most sensible thing to do," agreed the guide. "We are all pretty hungry, I reckon, after our long tramp."

CHAPTER IX

BEAR STEAK FOR BREAKFAST

WITHOUT further delay Vaughn cut the throat of one of the dead bears, that the animal might bleed freely.

"You always should do this as soon as possible, boys," he informed them. "However, do not make the mistake of going to the animal until you have put another bullet in his head after you think you have shot him dead. Claws are dangerous weapons. I will now show you how one man may hang the bear and do his own work of dressing the beast. Any one of you could do it, and you may have occasion to do so."

Cale dragged the bear head-foremost to a sapling. He then cut three poles of about ten feet in length, with crotches near the ends. Next he amazed his pupils by climbing the sapling until it bent down with him.

"Think I have gone crazy?" smiled the guide.

The boys were too interested to answer.

The top of the sapling was well trimmed off with a hatchet, leaving the stub of one stout branch near the top. Removing his belt, Vaughn fastened it around the bear's neck, then slipped the loop over the end of the sapling which he was holding down with one hand and the weight of his body. He let go the sapling, which, acting as a sort of spring pole, raised the carcass slightly.

The crotches of the poles were then placed under the fork of the sapling, the butts of the poles outward, thus forming a tripod. Cale next pushed first on one pole, then on the other. With each push the dead bear was raised a little higher until its body finally was clear of the ground, and only the hind claws trailing the earth.

"Easy when you know how, isn't it?" he smiled.

The Pony Rider Boys decided that it was.

"Now, in case I were not ready to butcher, I would build a smudge fire of rotten wood under the carcass, banking the fire well with stones to keep it from spreading. That would serve to keep away the blowflies and birds."

Beginning at the head the guide skinned the animal in quick time. He then removed the entrails, and in a quarter of an hour announced that his task was completed.

After the carcass got cold, he explained, he would split it in halves along the backbone and quarter it, leaving one rib on each hind quarter.

"Aren't we going to have any of it for supper?" wailed Stacy.

"No, indeed. You don't want to eat warm meat, do you?"

"I don't care whether it is warm or cold so long as I get the meat," the fat boy made reply.

"That proves it," declared Rector with emphasis.

"Proves what?" demanded Stacy.

"That your early ancestors were cannibals."

Chunky snorted disgustedly.

"Now, do you think you boys could skin and dress a bear?" asked Cale, surveying his work with critical eyes.

"I think so," replied Tad. "Of course we could not do it as skilfully as you have done, but we are learning fast. May we save the hide?"

"I am afraid it would be too much of a burden to carry. I'll tell you what I will do. You see I have cut off the head with the pelt. I will salt the hide well and cache it, then if I am able to get in here some day soon, I will take the hide out and have it tanned for you."

"Thank you. May I try my hand on the other one?" asked Tad.

"You surely may."

Butler was rather clumsy in making his preparations. Twice did the sapling that he had climbed get away from him and spring up into the air, but Tad simply climbed the slender young tree again each time and bent it down. He finally succeeded in slipping his belt over the crotch after having passed it about the bear's neck. The rest was easy, so far as raising the bear was concerned.

"There! How is that?" he demanded triumphantly.

"Just as well as I could have done it myself," said Vaughn, nodding approvingly.

"I thought you always hung them up by the heels," ventured Ned.

"Yes, it is common practice to hang up by the gambrels, with the head down, but when hung head up the animal is much easier to skin and butcher, and drains better. Besides, it doesn't drip blood over the neck and head, which you may want to have mounted at some future date. Perhaps we had better bury this waste stuff, or we'll have all the bears in the section down on us first thing we know. By the way, we shall be having more bear here right along on account of that oil of anise, so we shall have to move our camp."

"Then make Chunky strike camp," sug-

gested Ned. "He is to blame for all this trouble."

"I am inclined to agree with your last statement. However, we will see to that. Charlie will do all the necessary work. I am sorry, for I wanted to go over and see my friend," said the guide.

"Didn't you go there to-day?" asked Stacy.

"No, we took another course. You missed it not being along."

"No, I didn't. I had all the fun and excitement I wanted right here in the camp. You are the ones who missed something," declared Stacy.

"We didn't miss all of the fun, anyway," replied Tad. "How about the bear meat, Mr. Vaughn?"

"Yes, don't we get any of that meat?" urged Stacy.

"You shall all have all you want for breakfast, but we shan't be able to carry much of it with us. Were we going to be here long enough I would smoke some of it. If it were only winter we should have enough meat to last us for weeks," answered the guide. "In many respects winter traveling in the woods is very desirable. Ever rough it in the winter?"

Tad said that they had not, but that they hoped to do so at some time in the near future.

Supper was a welcome meal that night, for everyone was hungry because they had had a hard fifteen-mile journey on foot over rugged ground.

Bear steak was served for breakfast. Yes, it was tough, but most of the party enjoyed it. Stacy ate and ate until they feared he would pop open, and Ned declared that Chunky would be growling like a bear before the forenoon came to an end.

Enough meat for two more meals was packed away to carry with them, after which camp was broken, and before eight o'clock the Pony Rider Boys were on their way. Their trail led them farther and farther into the dense forests. Vaughn had it in mind to make their next camp on the shores of a lake, where he thought that they might find something to interest them. The boys were willing. They were not particular where they went. It was all alike to some of them, ever new to others. Stacy cared only for what he found to eat, while Tad and Ned were for learning all they could about the woods and woodcraft, in all of which Cale Vaughn was an expert.

Charlie John was proving himself a most useful man in the camp, though Charlie was not to be depended upon when it came to fighting bear. He had proved another thing, too.

He was an excellent tree climber and could make the first limbs of a tree quicker than any other member of the party, especially when there was a bear below anxious to get a nip at the Indian's calves.

They made their new camping place some hours before dark. Charlie already had picked out a pleasant camp site, a short distance from the shore of the little lake, screened by trees and foliage, but in plain view of the water. The natural instinct of the Indian had taught him to so place his camp that it could not be readily seen from either the lake itself or from the surrounding country. This trait will be found in the white woodsman as well, copying perhaps an instinct inherent in his animal ancestor of a few million years back.

"Now," said the guide, after the boys had pitched their tents, "we haven't had a real lesson in preparing a cooking fire. I observe that you boys go at it in a sort of hit and miss way. You may have observed something of the woodsman's way of cooking by the manner in which Charlie fixed the fire in our camp yesterday."

"Yes, we did," answered Tad.

"I will go more into detail this time. The fire is more than half of good cookery in the woods, just as it is in your home kitchens.

You need a small fire, free from smoke and flame, with coals or dry twigs in reserve. There must be a way of regulating the heat just as in stoves, and there must be a rampart around the fire on which pots and pans will stand level and at the right elevation. Master Stacy, will you please fell a small, straight tree and cut from it two logs about six feet long, eight or ten inches thick?"

"*What?*"

The guide repeated his request.

Chunky hemmed and hawed.

"The fact is, Mr. Vaughn, I've got a weak heart. I'm afraid it would excite me too much to do that. You see I have to be very careful."

"I will cut down the tree," said Ned, stepping forward.

"Yes, perhaps it would overtax Master Stacy. There is a good tree for the purpose just beyond where the Professor is standing, Master Ned," nodded Cale.

Ned took up the axe and attacked the tree with vigorous blows. He had taken but a few of these when the axe flew from the helve, narrowly missing the Professor's head.

"Here, here!" cried the Professor. "What are you trying to do?"

"That was an axe-i-dent," chuckled the fat boy.

"Stop it!" yelled Ned.

"I agree with you," grinned the guide. "That was almost more than I could stand myself."

"I shall forget myself and hit you with this axe helve if you get off anything like that again, Stacy Brown," threatened Ned Rector.

"Bad, very bad," agreed the Professor.

"Shocking," nodded Tad.

In the meantime Cale was wedging the axe on the helve. Having completed his task he handed the axe back to Rector, who, a few moments later, sent the tree crashing down.

"I guess you have handled an axe before," said Vaughn.

"Yes. He is the champion wood-splitter of our town," Stacy informed him.

Cale flattened the top and one side of each log with the axe after Tad had finished Ned's job. These, the bed logs, the guide placed side by side, flat sides toward each other, about three inches apart at one end and some eight or ten at the other. By this time Charlie had gathered a supply of bark and hard wood which he placed from end to end between the bed pieces and lighted the fire.

While Charlie John was doing this, Cale planted at each end of the fire a forked stake about four feet high. Over these he laid a lug-

pole or cross-stick of green wood. Two or three green crotches from branches were cut, a nail driven in the small end of each, and the contrivance hung on the lug-pole from which to suspend the kettles. These pot-hooks were of different lengths for hard boiling or for simmering.

"These are 'lug-sticks,'" explained Vaughn. "A hook for lifting the kettles is a 'hook-stick.' I'll make some of those as soon as I finish with what I am doing now. In quick camp-making we sharpen a stick and drive it into the ground at an angle, and from this we suspend our kettle. That kind of arrangement up here in the Maine woods is called a 'wambeck' or 'spygelia.'"

"Sounds like the name of a patent medicine," observed Chunky.

"I agree with you," smiled the guide.

"How did it get such an outlandish name?" questioned the Professor.

"I am sure I don't know. Oh, you will find lots of funny names up here in the wilds. For instance, the frame built over a cooking fire is called by the Penobscots, 'kitchi-plak-wagn.' Some others call the 'lug-stick' a 'chiplokwaugan.'"

"Taken from 'chipmunk wagon,'" nodded the fat boy wisely.

"No doubt," replied the guide dryly. "Some of the guides have changed it to 'waugan-stick.' "

"You make me dizzy," declared Stacy Brown, passing a hand over his eyes.

"Then here is another for you that will render you wholly unconscious," went on Cale. "The gypsies call a pot-hook a 'kekauviscoe saster.' How is that?"

"Oh, help!" moaned the fat boy.

"I should say that was about the end of the limit," declared Tad Butler.

"In windy weather, or where fuel is scarce," continued Cale, "it is best to dig a trench eighteen inches wide, twelve inches deep and say four feet long, instead of cutting down a tree for your bed logs. Make a chimney of flat stones or sod at the leeward end. This will give you a good draft."

"We did something like that in the Rockies," Tad informed him.

"Build a fire in this trench with fire-irons or green sticks laid across it for the frying-pan and a frame above for the kettles, and there you are. I'd like to see any kitchen do any better."

"I guess we never knew very much about camping," said Tad.

"We know how to eat," asserted Stacy.

"At least one of us does," agreed Rector.

"Know how to make a bake-oven?" questioned Cale.

"Hot stones are as near as I have come to making anything of that sort," replied Tad.

"I won't show you now because we are in a hurry for our supper, but some day, when we have nothing in particular to do, I will make one and we will bake some bread that you will say is the equal of anything you ever had at home. How is that steak coming on, Charlie?"

"Him smell like him done," answered the Indian.

"Serve it up. We are ready for it. Master Stacy is so hungry that he has shrunk to half his natural size."

"I'll be a skeleton if I keep on," agreed the fat boy.

A steaming, savory meal was served there in the great forest with the odor of the pines mingling with those of bear steak and boiling coffee. To these hungry boys it seemed that nothing ever had tasted so good to them in all their lives. And they did full justice to the meal, too.

CHAPTER X

BLAZING A FOREST TRAIL

"EVERY time you turn around the scenery has shifted," complained Tad Butler, as the four boys stood on a rise of ground gazing this way and that for familiar signs, while waiting for the guide, with whom they had been out hunting and studying woodcraft.

"I thought I knew my way about in the woods, but I find I don't know as much as a yearling," answered Rector. "Where is that guide?"

"Maybe he has gone home," suggested Stacy.

"I guess he has not gone far," said Ned. "He said he wanted to get a look at an old burn some little way to the northward."

"I'll go look for him," offered Walter.

Tad Butler was already too good a woodsman to permit his friend to do anything of the sort. Tad said they must keep together.

"For the sake of making conversation, which way would you go if you were about to follow Mr. Vaughn?" he asked.

"That way," answered Walter, pointing.

"And you, Ned?"

"Just the opposite direction."

"Chunky, which way would you go?"

"I? I wouldn't go at all. I would just sit right down here, plump."

"You would show your good sense in doing that very thing. Boys, you are all wrong, except Chunky. Mr. Vaughn went that way, to the eastward."

"How do you know?" asked Ned.

"Because I watched him and saw him blaze a tree with his hatchet."

"But we don't see any blazes," objected Walter.

"That is because we are on the wrong side of it, Walt," replied Ned.

"Right you are," approved Butler.

"But why doesn't he put the blaze on this side of the trees so we can see them?" questioned Walter.

"For the very good reason that he marked the trees on the side that would be facing him when he returned," Tad informed them. "However, had he desired to mark his trees so that one approaching from the way he will return would not see the blazes, he would have blazed the trees on this side. That is what is called back-blazing."

"Tad is the woodsman," nodded Rector.

"He thinks he is," Chunky chimed in.

"No, I don't. I have realized, since coming up here, that I don't know enough about the woods to tell when a tree is going to fall. Did you notice another trick of Mr. Vaughn's when we were coming out here?"

The boys shook their heads.

"He broke the tops of bushes at intervals. I noticed, too, that he bent them all in the same direction. I don't know the meaning of it, but I guess it had something to do with direction."

"There he comes now. Ask him," cried Rector.

"Hello! I thought you boys would be lost before this," called Cale, with a twinkle in his eyes.

"We might have been, at that," declared Ned. "At least Walt would have been. Chunky wouldn't move and Tad, though he pointed the way you had gone, wouldn't let us move away. We were talking about your having bent over some bushes on the trail here. Tad said it was to indicate the direction we had taken as you bent them all in the same direction."

"Master Tad has keen eyes. He is right. In venturing into strange forests, far from human habitation, one should do this occasion-

ally in addition to blazing or marking trees with the hatchet. The way to do is to bend a green bush over in the way you are going, snapping the stem or clipping it with the hatchet, but letting it adhere by the bark, so that the under or lighter side of the foliage will be looking you in the face when you return."

"Why, a man couldn't lose his way with that kind of a trail, could he?" asked Rector.

"Well, he might," admitted Cale. "But, if he is being pursued by enemies, or for any other reason does not wish to leave a conspicuous trail, he had better not bend bushes. In blazing, remember that a single blaze should always be made on the side away from the camp. If the side toward the camp be marked it should be with two blazes instead of one. Remember that. It may come in handy one of these days. Master Tad, what is the gun signal when one is lost?"

"A shot, a pause, then two shots," answered Butler promptly.

"Right. What time of day? Wait! Let's see if any of the others know," said Cale quickly, seeing that Tad was about to reply.

"I don't understand what you mean," said Rector.

"What time of the day would you pay attention to that sort of a signal?"

"Any time I heard it," answered the fat boy. "Provided, of course, that there wasn't anybody else to go."

"I give it up," said Ned.

"After four o'clock in the afternoon is the rule, I believe," answered Tad in response to a nod from the guide.

"Yes, that's right. That is the hour the camp-keeper is supposed to blow his horn to call home the wanderers. We are too far away, of course, to hear the horn. We must be all of twenty miles from camp. We are now five miles from our ponies."

"It strikes me that it is pretty near time for us to be getting to the animals, then," suggested Tad.

"Why?"

"Because it is going to rain and the afternoon is getting late."

Vaughn nodded. He was losing no opportunity to teach the boys the art of woodcraft, and woodcraft, with all its tricks, was what the Pony Rider Boys wanted to learn. They were learning fast, too, though Tad Butler was the most apt pupil of the four. He never forgot a thing that had been told him. His memory, too, was of great service to him in the woods, as had been demonstrated on other occasions in previous trips. Once he had set his eyes on

a peculiar tree or a rock or a formation, he never forgot it. A man with a short memory or lack of observation has a hard time in the woods, and usually a searching party has to go out after him in such a country as this where, were a novice to stray ten rods from camp, he might never find his way back without help.

Great drops of rain began to patter down a few minutes after the subject had been mentioned. The party had left their ponies when the way became impassable for horses, and had gone on on foot. Stacy went with them because he did not relish the idea of being left alone in the woods. Otherwise nothing would have induced him to foot it over the hills, through the tangled growth of blackberry and raspberry briars in old burns, stumbling over charred snags, fallen trunks and limbs, until there was scarcely a spot on any of their bodies that was not mauled to tenderness. A mile an hour is fair time through this sort of country.

Cale decided that it was high time to be going. He took a keen look about him, eyed his charges, then turning to Tad said:

"You lead the way."

Tad started off confidently—in the wrong direction. Cale did not set him right. But the boy had gone but a few yards when he

discovered his mistake. With flushed face, he retraced his steps to the starting point, then took a new course. The first course he had followed was the one Vaughn had taken earlier in the day. The present one led to the temporary camp where their ponies had been tethered.

"You did perfectly right," approved the guide.

"I made a mess of it at the start, sir," replied Butler. A new problem was confronting Tad. He saw that darkness would overtake them within a short half hour, and the boy did not know how he was going to find his way then. He knew it would be impossible to find the blazes or axe-marks on the trees. Had he been alone he probably would have made camp while it was still light enough to enable him to see the trail. Such a night would have been far from pleasant, but then when daylight came he would have the satisfaction of knowing where he was.

The rain was increasing in volume every moment, and not having rubber coats with them the boys were soon soaked. This not being a new experience they uttered no complaints until Chunky finally wailed his disappointment that he had forgotten to bring an umbrella.

Just before dark Tad called a halt, and, borrowing the guide's hatchet, peeled off a liberal

quantity of birch bark, dividing up the load between his companions. Stacy complained loudly at being obliged to carry the stuff. He didn't see any reason why they should lug firewood to camp. They would find plenty when they got there.

"Master Tad knows what he is doing, I reckon," nodded the guide, who understood Butler's motive. "Ordinarily I don't believe in the sixth sense business, but some persons are more adept than others in woodcraft. To me that means that some persons are more alert and observant than others. Master Tad has just proved this. He has used his powers of observation in several different directions since we started on the return. He was alert enough to discover that we were going to be caught out after dark."

"There is one thing he doesn't know," piped Chunky.

"What is that?" questioned Cale tolerantly.

"He doesn't know enough to keep in out of the wet."

"Do you?" asked Tad.

"No, I don't, and I'm kicking myself because of it. You had better believe I shall know better next time. You don't catch me again this way, not if I am awake at the time. Are we nearly there?"

"About five miles from the ponies," answered Mr. Vaughn.

Chunky groaned dismally.

"You had better light up now," suggested the guide. "Be careful not to drop any fire, even if the ground is wet."

"No, not the rest of you," objected Tad, as the others began reaching for their matches. "One torch will be enough. Our torches won't hold out if we all light up at the same time."

"Right," approved Cale.

Tad lighted his torch while the guide held his hat over the match. Then the party moved on again. As darkness fell their progress naturally grew more slow. They had to use extreme care not to miss any of the little blaze marks on the trees, and at the same time to note every bush that had been bent toward them.

Water was running from hat brims, clothing was soaked as was everything in their pockets, and water spurted from their boots with every step.

"How would you like a pound or so of that bear steak, Chunky?" asked Ned, shouting in the fat boy's ear.

"Hot off the frying pan," added Tad.

"With a cup of steaming hot coffee added to it, while you were listening to the rain pat-

tering on the roof of your tent," suggested Walter.

"All sitting tight and snug as a bug in a rug?" asked the fat boy. "No, I couldn't stand it. My heart is too weak. I should die of heart failure. And, incidentally, if you fellows keep on nagging me, something's going to happen. Mind you, I am not making any threats."

"You had better not if you know what is best for you," warned Rector.

"But I am just saying what will take place, that's all. I—" Stacy did not complete the sentence. He stumbled over a dead limb and plunged head first into a bed of mold that streaked his face with black, filling his mouth and eyes, to the great delight of the rest of the party and the discomfiture of the fat boy. Stacy kept quiet for a long time after that.

After four hours of this sort of traveling—it was now near ten o'clock at night—Tad halted, and, raising his torch above his head, gazed about him, trying to light up the shadows up in the trees. The Pony Rider Boy was trying to get his bearings. Cale was observing him with twinkling eyes.

A twig snapped off to the right of them and a horse whinnied.

"Here we are," cried Butler. "That was Silver Face calling to me."

"I was expecting to see you go on past the place," chuckled Vaughn. "Well done, my lad! Had you lived all your life in the woods you could not have made a better campfall."

"What, are we home?" cried Walter.

"We are at our temporary camp. Luckily for us, too," said the guide, "for our torches have all burned out. Stamp that out, Master Tad. We will have a fire going in a short time."

The boys turned toward their ponies, stumbling over obstructions, guided by the snorts of welcome from the little animals that they could hear but were unable to see. They were to learn some new tricks in woodcraft right then and there, something that they probably never would have learned of themselves. Even Cale Vaughn's resources were to be taxed somewhat in overcoming the difficulties that now confronted them.

CHAPTER XI

FACING NEW OBSTACLES

"THE first thing to be done," announced the guide, "is to get either some pitch pine or some birch bark."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Stacy in a hollow voice. "Easily said."

"I am afraid that is beyond me," declared Tad Butler.

The other boys were of the same mind. Cale directed them to stand where they were while he made a search for the desired wood. They could hear him threshing around in the darkness, the sounds growing fainter and fainter until they were finally lost in the steady patter of the heavy raindrops showering down on them through the foliage. Now and then the raindrops became a deluge as a breeze, stirring the tops of the trees, sent a chilling shower over their shivering bodies.

"Whoo-ee!" It was the voice of the guide.

"Whoo-ee!" answered Tad.

Cale was seeking for the camp. Tad's voice guided him quickly to it.

"Did you find it?" questioned Butler as the guide strode in.

"I did. I have some choice pine knots here. Wait until I whittle some fine shavings, then we will have a nice little fire. I've got some bark, too. That will answer until we get a light to see what we are about."

"Shall I get out the dog tent?" asked Tad.

"Yes, you might as well, if you can find it."

"I know where to lay my hands on it."

While Tad was occupied with this the other boys stood shivering against the trunks of trees, trying to shelter themselves from the storm, but without marked success.

A faint light flared up as Vaughn struck a match under his hat, but a sudden gust extinguished it.

"Boys, I am not fit to be called a woodsman," grumbled the guide. "I failed to fill my match safe before leaving camp this morning."

"I have matches," spoke up Rector.

"In a waterproof case?" asked the guide.

"No, in my pocket."

"No good! They are soaked to a pulp. Master Tad, have you a match safe?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good."

"Oh, fudge, I have lost it," groaned Tad. "I am a greenhorn to do a thing like that."

"No, it was not your fault that you lost it. It was my fault that I forgot to fill mine. So you are in the better position of the two," said Vaughn.

"What are we going to do now?" asked Ned.

"I'm going to stand against this tree until I fall over," declared Stacy. "There will be a dead Pony Rider Boy at the foot of this tree in the morning."

"Buck up!" commanded Rector.

"I can't. All the buck is soaked out of me," wailed the fat boy.

"We might as well put up the tent while we are about it," advised Cale. "After that we shall see what can be done."

"Is—is there anything to eat in the packs?" begged Chunky.

"We shall find something," replied Cale cheerfully. "This is nothing, except the provoking part of not having any matches. Got the tent, Master Tad?"

"Yes, sir."

"I will cut a sapling or two for the frame; then we will put the camp to rights."

"There are two saplings right here by the ponies that I think will answer the purpose. Shall I cut them, Mr. Vaughn?" asked Butler.

"No, I will do that."

Tad and the guide worked in the darkness

almost to as good purpose as if the hour had been midday. In a short time they had pitched the little tent in which the five were to sleep that night. Next they gathered all the spruce and cedar boughs they could lay their hands on, shaking the water from the browse as best they could, then piling the stuff inside the tent until the little structure was almost full to the peak.

"Isn't there anything I can do?" asked Ned.

"Not now. Too many at this job would hold the work back," answered the guide.

"You have a plan for getting a light?" questioned Butler.

"I am going to try it," answered the guide. "Got anything dry about your person?"

"My throat is the only dry part of me," answered Tad in a hoarse, laughing voice.

"I think I have something dry. That part of my shirt that is under the tail of my coat I think is fairly dry. I am going to try to show you a trick worth while," announced the guide.

Cale took a cartridge from his belt. He extracted the bullet with his teeth, then placed a wad over the powder. Next he ripped a piece of cloth from the lower part of his shirt, guarding it from the rain, and placing the cartridge in his rifle, he poked the piece of dry cloth loosely into the barrel of the gun.

"Don't be scared, boys. I'm going to shoot," warned the guide.

"Wha—what are you going to shoot at?" cried Stacy.

"At you, if you don't keep still," answered the voice of one of the boys, though Chunky did not know which one.

A flash and a report followed. A few seconds later the boys were amazed to see a glowing ball descending apparently from the tops of the tall spruce.

"Good gracious, what is it?" cried Rector.

"That is our light," answered the guide.

"But I don't understand."

"I will explain to you later. I'll warrant Master Tad understands."

"Yes, I know how you did that, Mr. Vaughn. It's a trick worth while, too," answered Butler. "But what are you going to fire with it?"

"You'll see. Will you shield me from the wind with a blanket while I am starting this fire, Butler?"

Tad kept the blanket in place by standing on two corners, the other two corners being gripped in his upraised hands, while the guide, having pared some thin shavings from the pitch pine and made a pile of bark and pine ready for the flame, was blowing on the glowing wad that he had shot from the gun.

All at once a little flame leaped up from the pine shavings.

"Hooray!" shouted the Pony Rider Boys.

"We don't need matches to build a fire in this outfit," laughed Tad.

"No, we need neither matches nor gunpowder. I can start a fire anywhere, and so can you, Master Tad," returned Cale.

"I shall believe it after this," nodded Tad.

"Now if you will drive a couple of stakes into the ground on the windward side of the fire, and fasten the blanket up, I think the fire will stay where it is for the rest of the night, unless the wind shifts in the meantime. Come, boys, get the packs under the tent. Make yourselves useful unless you are in no hurry for your supper."

This had the desired effect. The boys hustled. Their good humor returned instantly. Wet as they were—and they could have been no wetter had they jumped into a pond—they forgot all about discomfort in their eagerness to get ready for their late supper.

The campfire had been built close to the front of the tent, whose roof, sloping back away from the fire, caught and deflected the heat down over the browse, drying that out very rapidly, filling the little tent with warmth.

"This is what I call fine," declared Chunky, throwing himself down on the browse.

"Come out of that," commanded Tad. "We are not ready to loaf yet. Bring the saddles in and stow them in the corner. Every man must do his part now."

Stacy grumbled at this, but obeyed Tad's command, knowing that if he did not Tad would be after him with a sharp stick. Mr. Vaughn cooked the supper. There was not a great variety—bacon, biscuit and coffee, the water for which had been brought from a nearby spring.

"You see," said Cale, while doing the cooking, "how necessary water is to a camp. Had we not staked down our ponies by the spring here before leaving them this forenoon we would be in a fix now and obliged to go to bed supperless. It would have been a thankless task to look for a spring at this time of the night in the rain. However, I don't need to tell you this. You have been through it before."

"We have," answered Tad. "We have learned the value of water from sad experience."

"So have I," agreed the fat boy. "I use it for washing every day."

"Come and get it," cried the guide.

They arranged themselves as best they could in the tent, while Cale handed around the supper. There was little conversation for the next ten minutes. The boys were too busy.

"After supper we shall have to rustle for firewood," said the guide after a time.

"I will look after that," offered Tad.

"We will all go out," added Rector.

"No, it isn't necessary for all of us to get wet," answered Tad. "I suppose the ponies will have to stay out in the wet, but they are used to that. Do we go back to our other camp in the morning, Mr. Vaughn?"

"Yes. One day and night of this, I guess, will be enough for you boys for one time."

"I wouldn't mind a month of it," answered Tad.

"Nor I," agreed Ned.

"Not for me," spoke up Stacy. "I have had enough to last me a lifetime already. Next time I remain in camp, bears or no bears. Just think of the Professor snoring away in that nice, comfortable tent. Oh, dear!"

No one gave heed to the fat boy's plaints. They were enjoying themselves too thoroughly after their long wet walk. After supper the boys began to put the camp in shape for the night. Tad cut down a tree, getting a shower of water over him and wetting himself to the skin again. This tree he chopped into proper lengths for a campfire while Ned and Walter toted them to camp. The interior of the tent was thoroughly dried out by this time, so that

when they were ready for bed their bedroom was warm and sweet and dry. They had dried out their blankets fairly well, and wrapping up in them the boys settled down for a night's rest just at midnight. They did not remember ever to have had a better night's rest. It seemed as if they had just gone to sleep when they were awakened by Cale.

"Time to get up," he called cheerily. "We will have a quick breakfast, then you will lead us back to camp, Master Tad."

Packs were quickly lashed after breakfast, and before the sun had topped the fronds of the great pines the party was wending its way through the trackless forest, Tad leading the way with unerring instinct, backed by keenest observation.

CHAPTER XII

CHUNKY MEETS A BULL MOOSE

"THAT was as fine a piece of trailing as ever a mountaineer did, Master Tad," announced Cale approvingly as they came in sight of the little lake where the permanent camp was pitched.

"Oh, it is easy to follow a trail so plainly marked as was that," answered Butler.

"Not so easy as you would make it out to be. None but an experienced woodsman could follow even that trail, let me tell you, young man. And even on a clear trail there isn't that man living who doesn't get lost once in a while. When you do get lost, sit down and think it over. Don't get the willyjigs and go all to pieces."

"I never do," replied Tad. "Still, that isn't saying that I wouldn't get them up here."

"What are the willyjigs?" asked Stacy.

"Going into a panic; in other words, getting rattled when you realize that you are lost."

"Is it anything like buck fever when you are trying to shoot at an animal?" asked Rector.

"About the same thing."

"That's what Ned had when he shot the rope off the bear the other day," piped Stacy.

"I didn't," expostulated Ned.

"Master Stacy is right at that, I guess," laughed Vaughn. The guide raised his voice in a signal to the camp. "There is Charlie John," he said.

The Indian came down to the shore of the lake upon hearing the call. He made out the party in a moment, though they had halted in the shadows of the trees to see if he would discover them. Charlie did.

"Indians have sharp eyes," said Tad.

"Yes, even the half-breeds," agreed Cale.

"Hold my gun. I'm going to swim it," announced Tad.

"The water is too cold," objected Cale.

"I don't care."

Tad quickly stripped off his clothes, and Ned decided that he, too, needed a swim, so he undressed. The two lads plunged into the little lake, and Ned uttered a yell when his body came in contact with the almost ice-cold water.

"Swim hard and you will not notice it," chattered Tad.

"I s-s-s-see you don't," answered Ned.

"Race me for the other side. Now, go!" cried Tad.

The boys struck out in swift, powerful strokes. Cale Vaughn's eyes sparkled as he observed the swimmers.

"I would give a great deal if I could swim like that," he mused.

"Oh, that's nothing. I can beat that swimming with my feet tied," answered Stacy. "I'm a natural-born swimmer."

"I should say you were a natural everything, according to your idea of yourself," grinned the guide.

"Don't make fun of me. I am sensitive about that," replied Chunky with an injured look on his face.

"Come, we had better be on the move. Those two boys will be wanting their clothes," answered Cale. They started around the shore of the lake, finding very good traveling. But the swimmers were ahead of them. Tad and Ned were running up and down the beach to stir their circulation, their teeth chattering, their bodies blue with the cold.

"Hurry, hurry!" yelled Tad.

"I'm a human icicle. I'll freeze fast to the shore if you don't hurry!" chattered Ned.

"Never mind. We can break you loose with an axe," retorted Stacy in a jeering tone.

By this time the Professor had brought towels, whereat the two boys began rubbing down,

and in a few moments the blue of their flesh turned to pink. Chunky cast their clothes on the ground.

"You fellows do love to work, don't you?" he grunted.

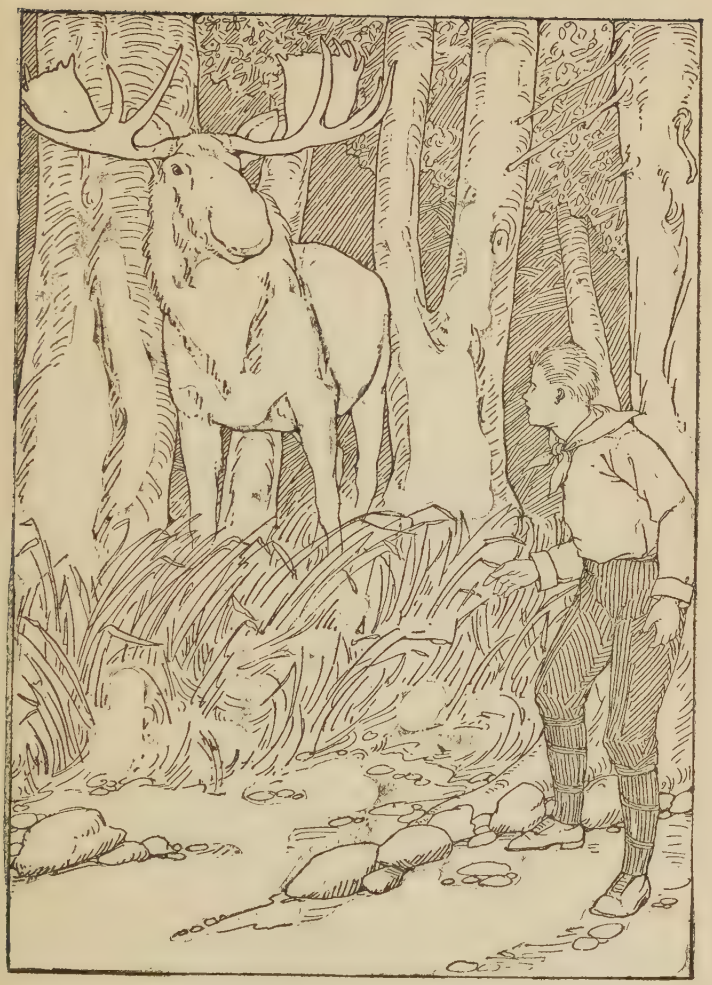
"All healthy human beings should like to work," answered Tad. "I smell dinner."

"Dinner!" cried Chunky, starting on a run for the campfire where the Indian was preparing the noonday meal.

After dinner Stacy went to sleep while his companions were relating the story of their experiences to the Professor, and the guide was telling him what a clever woodsman Master Tad was.

Stacy was awakened by the voices of his companions. With a growl of disgust at being disturbed, he scrambled to his feet and started sleepily out into the forest, hoping to find a snug place in which to lie down and finish his nap. The boy was almost asleep as he blindly made his way from camp, but without attracting the attention of the others. Getting a little way from camp he leaned heavily against a tree. One solitary snore escaped his lips.

Stacy pulled himself together, opening his eyes slightly, then closing them again. Somehow he had a faint idea that he had seen something that was not a part of the for-



Before Him Stood a Huge Animal.

est, something that had made him start with disagreeable expectation.

Being brave, however, Chunky forced himself to open his eyes.

"Wow!" he gasped.

Before him, some five rods away, stood a huge animal, of aspect so terrifying that young Brown couldn't, for the moment, even guess to which class of lower animals it belonged.

It was huge, this solid apparition, with a long, beak-shaped nose. From its head branched upward a pair of enormous antlers with many branches. The ends of these antlers looked as though they might be as sharp as needles. When the animal pawed the ground and snorted Stacy shivered again, yet seemed unable to run.

It was a giant bull moose, a savage enough fellow even when confronted by an armed, cool and experienced hunter.

Again it snorted, its beak-like jaw lowering toward the ground.

"It's going to nibble at the grass—I must be slipping away," thought the terrified fat boy. Next he discovered that the animal's gaze was fastened upon him.

Then, suddenly, the great bulk, its head still lowered, and the cruel-looking antlers pointed straight at the boy, charged!

"The fellows will never know how scared I

died!'' gasped the shaking boy, who was now incapable of motion.

Stacy tried to shut his eyes, but was so fascinated that he couldn't. He couldn't remove his gaze from those awful antlers!

Then kindly Nature stepped in. Stacy's swift despair reached such a height of frenzy that he swooned. Sideways he toppled, away from the tree.

Bump! went the bull moose's lowered head against the tree, with fearful force and an awesome noise. The impact was so terrific that the moose, stunned, recoiled, then toppled over just as Stacy had done

CHAPTER XIII

AN EXCITING DAY IN CAMP

THE moose struggled for a few seconds, then stiffened out.

"What was that?" demanded the sharp-eared Tad.

"It sounded like a tree falling," answered Rector.

"No, it was something else," answered the guide, intently listening.

"Where is Stacy?" demanded the Professor.

"That's so, he isn't here," wondered Walter. "Where can he have gone?"

Stacy Brown about this time was struggling to his feet. His terrified eyes were looking at the stunned hulk lying there on the ground. Then Stacy Brown found his voice. He uttered a wild yell of terror.

Cale Vaughn was on his feet in a twinkling. But quick as he was, Tad was ahead of him, tearing through the brush to the rescue of the fat boy, who, all believed, had got into some new difficulty. Bears was the first thought of the quicker-witted ones.

Stacy heard his friends coming, then a sudden thought occurred to him. Whipping out his keen-edged hunting knife the fat boy sprang forward, giving the knife a swift sweep over the neck of the fallen, stunned bull.

Chunky leaped back, uttering another yell, this time of triumph rather than fear.

"I got him! I got him!" he yelled.

At this juncture Tad came tearing through the brush.

"What is it? What is it? Here he is. Here—"

Tad Butler came to a sudden halt, at the same time slipping his revolver from its holster, but as quickly replacing it when he observed the real condition of affairs.

There stood Stacy with the crimsoned knife still in hand, the other hand thrust in his trousers pocket, his chest thrown out, his head tilted back at an angle that threatened to topple him over backwards.

"What—what?" gasped Tad.

By that time Cale Vaughn had reached Tad's side.

"What has happened here?" demanded the guide sharply.

"That," answered Tad, pointing to the dying moose that had fallen a victim to the fat boy's hunting knife.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Cale. He, too, was well-nigh speechless. "Who did that?"

"I did it with my little knife," answered the fat boy pompously.

"It's a bull moose, sir, and the boy has killed it," said the guide in a puzzled voice, as the Professor, with Ned Rector and Walter Perkins, came running up to them. "This is the most remarkable thing I ever heard of."

"Oh, that's nothing," replied Chunky airily. "It is only pleasant pastime to go out and kill a moose by hand."

The party was now standing about the fallen animal, but they took care not to approach too closely, for the bull was still kicking. Tad shook his head.

"How did this happen?" demanded the guide, turning on Chunky sharply.

"He sailed into me, sir. Yes, sir, he lighted right into me with all four feet and his horns. We had it tooth and nail all over the place. It was a dandy battle. You ought to have seen it. Talk about your boxing matches."

"But how did you do it?" insisted the guide, not believing Stacy's story.

"With my little knife, of course. How did you suppose I cut his throat? Did you think I bit it in two?"

"I'd hardly give you credit for being quite

so hungry as that," answered Cale with the suspicion of a twinkle. "Let us have the story."

"I am telling you—"

"My, but he is a big one!" exclaimed Ned.

"The largest one I ever saw. He is a terror. He must weigh more than fifteen hundred pounds," interrupted Mr. Vaughn.

"Most remarkable, most remarkable!" muttered the Professor, while Walter Perkins gazed in awe upon the fat boy, who was literally swelling with importance.

"I was dancing around like a boxer," continued Chunky. "I fought him with my bare hands until I happened to think of my knife. I drew my knife and I made a pass at him, but he jumped away. Oh, it was a fine bout, don't you folks forget it for a minute! Well, after a time I found an opening, then I let him have it right across the jug—jug—jugular."

"But what was that crash we heard?" asked Vaughn.

"That? Oh, that was when he fell down," answered Stacy a little lamely.

"Hm-m-m!" mused the guide. Vaughn was not convinced. He knew that there was more to it than appeared on the surface. Chancing to catch the eyes of Tad Butler, he saw that Tad was of the same opinion.

"He is dead now. We can look him over," announced the guide.

"Isn't that a dandy pair of antlers?" cried Butler.

"Very fine indeed," agreed Cale.

"The finest specimens I have ever seen," nodded the Professor.

"We can take the antlers home with us, can we not?" asked Ned.

"You mean I can," interposed Stacy.

"I am afraid it wouldn't do," replied Vaughn thoughtfully. "I know it is a pity to leave such a pair here in the woods, but it would not be safe to take them out."

"I guess I *will* take them out," bristled Chunky.

"Why will it not be safe, Mr. Vaughn?" inquired Tad.

"Because it is against the law to shoot moose at this time of the year."

"I didn't shoot him. I knifed him," answered the fat boy.

"That makes no difference; you killed him. The open season is from October fifteenth to December first. You see we are a long way from an open season in the middle of June."

The boys looked solemn.

"Oh, that's too bad," said Tad.

"I'll tell you what we will do," decided the

guide, after a few moments' reflection. "I will cut off the head and we will bury the antlers. When the open season comes along I will drop out here and get the antlers. We can't hope to preserve the head that long, but the antlers themselves will be no small trophy when you consider that this is one of the largest bulls ever taken in the Maine woods. And, further, we shall have some fine moose steak. It will probably be a little tough from this big fellow, but it isn't every day that you can have moose steak for dinner. Where is Charlie?"

"In camp," answered Walter.

Cale shouted to him. He ordered the Indian to cut poles and prepare for butchering the dead bull. Tad asked if he might do it, to which request the guide gave a willing assent. This was somewhat different from butchering a bear weighing only a few hundred pounds. A three-quarter-ton moose was not an easy proposition to butcher. Tad tugged and perspired, and in the end was forced to ask for assistance in getting the animal off the ground. Cale smiled.

"I thought you would be calling for help pretty soon," he said. "No one man could handle that carcass alone. Here, Charlie, get hold of the hind legs and help drag the fellow over between those two trees, then dig a hole so we

can bury everything that would show what we have done. We don't want anybody to know about this, now that it is done."

It took Tad nearly an hour and a half to complete his job, and when he had finished he was ready for another bath in the lake, which he took, at the same time washing his clothes and dancing up and down the beach while they were drying out in the sun. Tad said one moose was enough for him. If he ever had to dress another he wouldn't dress it.

During all this time Chunky Brown was strolling up and down with chest thrown out, his hands in his trousers pockets. His achievement was the talk of the camp. The boys were greatly excited, more or less envious of what Stacy had accomplished.

Tad, after he had donned his clothes, returned to the scene of the conflict. He examined the ground, then turned his attention to the tree. The boy devoted some moments to a certain spot on the tree where the bark had been broken by the blow from the moose's head. Tad grinned, but he said nothing to his companions upon his return to camp. It was too good to tell. He did not know how much Cale knew or suspected, but he realized that the guide did not quite believe all that Stacy had told them about the battle.

"Now tell us about that fight with the moose again?" urged Tad.

Chunky was willing.

"Well, it was this way," he began, leaning against a tree, the others being seated about the fire.

"You mean it was *that* way," suggested Rector.

"I mean what I said. If you know more about it than I do, suppose you tell the story. I went out there because I heard something—no, I guess I didn't hear anything at the start. However, I went out there."

"Yes, we know you went out there," said Tad. "If you hadn't gone out there, how could you have gotten there?"

"I—I went out there."

"To sleep?" asked Ned.

"Well, yes, I guess I did. After a time I woke up. I saw this big bull sniffing around. I didn't know what he was at first. I thought he was an elephant until I saw his horns."

"Didn't think it was a cow, did you?" inquired Tad solemnly.

"I did not," answered the fat boy with dignity. "About the time I discovered him he saw me. Then—then—then he went for me. You should have seen him come!"

"Show us how he did it," nodded the guide.

The fat boy, forgetful of his new dignity, lowered his head as close to the ground as possible without falling over on his face and began prancing about the camp, bellowing hoarsely.

"Just like that?" asked Ned.

"Yes, just like that, only awfully fierce!"

The Professor was regarding the boy narrowly. A dawning suspicion was in his mind that Stacy was drawing the long bow. But Professor Zepplin made no comment.

"And then?" inquired Cale quietly.

"And then we met. I—I must have grabbed the bull by the horns after he had swung around twice and tried to kick me—"

"That sounds more like a kangaroo than a bull moose," observed the Professor.

"It was this same moose, Professor. This is what is known as the kicking species of moose," answered Tad, trying to keep a straight face.

"Yes, he is like some folks we know not more than a mile and a half from here. He was a kicker. Well, I caught him by the horns just like this. Then you should have seen the fun. Why we thrashed around"—Stacy was acting it all out, bellowing loudly—"he flopped me this way and that. Funny thing, but I never thought of my knife."

"No?" said the guide, elevating his eyebrows slightly.

"No, sir. Of course if I had had a gun, I would have shot him. But I didn't have a gun, and having so few chances to use my knife, I never thought a thing about it. Well, we had it hot and heavy until I did think of the knife."

"Why didn't you let go?" asked Walter.

"Fine thing to do, that," answered Stacy scornfully. "Why, he would have bored me through with his antlers; then he would have come into camp and killed you all. You see, I was determined to save *your* lives as well as my own."

"Noble boy!" murmured Rector.

"Very considerate, indeed," observed the Professor dryly.

"Why didn't you call for help?" asked Cale.

"I had use for my breath," replied Stacy quickly. "I couldn't yell without taking my mind off the brute. Then he would have finished me. After a while I did think of the knife. At the first opportunity I whipped it out and gave him one cut across the neck. But, sir, I didn't let go until he fell over. I almost went down with him. Then he fell over and I let out a yell."

"That is the most dramatic account I have ever listened to," observed Cale soberly.

"Most remarkable," added the Professor, stroking his beard.

"What a star Chunky would be in the Fibbers' Club," grumbled Ned Rector.

"And that's how I did it," finished the fat boy, beginning to whistle through his teeth as he strolled back and forth with hands in his pockets. Stacy Brown was now thoroughly convinced that he was in a class all by himself. He had suspected as much before. Now he knew it. But a day of unhappiness was at hand when the fat boy would wish he never had come into the big woods.

CHAPTER XIV

LAID UP BY AN ACCIDENT

"CALE fell down!" shouted Stacy Brown.

Tad Butler sprang up and ran out where they had dressed the moose.

"What is the matter?" cried the lad. "Ah, you're hurt, Mr. Vaughn?"

The guide was sitting on the ground with both hands clasped about his left ankle. His face was drawn and pained.

"Did you turn the ankle?" asked Tad solicitously.

"Yes. If it isn't worse than that I shall be in great luck."

"How did it happen?"

"I slipped from a round stone that somebody had put in front of the stretcher there."

"Chunky, was that your work?"

The fat boy shamefacedly admitted it was.

"If you can't cause trouble in one way you are sure to in another," rebuked Tad.

"He wasn't to blame. Don't blame him for everything," reproved Cale.

"Let me assist you to camp. We will see what is the trouble," said Tad, placing both hands under the arms of the suffering guide and raising him to his feet. "The left foot? All right, you put an arm about my neck on that side and we will have you in camp in no time."

Butler helped Vaughn along slowly and gently, though Cale now and then grunted from the shooting pains in his ankle.

"You are very strong," said Cale. "No one would imagine you were so muscular to look at your slender figure."

"Oh, Professor," called Tad, "Mr. Vaughn has hurt his ankle. I think it is sprained."

Professor Zepplin was not a little disturbed at the announcement. He hurried forward, offering his arm, but Tad waved him aside, saying he could support the injured man alone perhaps better than two persons could do it. The boy guided his patient to the latter's tent where he placed the guide on a cot, then tenderly removed the boot from the injured foot.

"Thank you, little pard," smiled Cale. "You're as gentle as a woman—and I'm as soft. I oughtn't to let a little thing like this bother me."

"Professor, perhaps you had better examine it," suggested Tad.

Professor Zepplin did so gravely. He hurt the guide by pinching the ankle here and there, while the boys stood about looking on. Charlie John alone of the party went on with his work about the camp, unmoved, undisturbed.

"I am of the opinion that some of the bones are broken," announced the Professor.

"Oh, that's too bad!" groaned the boys.

"I suspected as much," nodded Tad.

"How did it happen?" asked the Professor.

"He slipped on a stone," answered Butler, while Stacy gazed up into the tree tops.

"A round stone," observed the fat boy solemnly.

"Yes, a round stone," nodded Tad, giving Stacy a quick look half of amusement, half of reproof.

Professor Zepplin did the best he could with the injured member, bathing it in liniment, then bandaging it skilfully, while Tad looked on with keen attention. He never lost an opportunity to learn, but in this instance, like the others of the party, Tad was grave, for this accident might seriously interfere with their journey. Mr. Vaughn was made as comfortable as possible, but he suffered a great deal of pain during the rest of the day. He was not a good patient, insisting that he ought to be up and doing. Tad resolutely commanded the guide to

keep on his back and remain quiet. He devoted his attention to Cale all the rest of the day and through the night, bathing the injured member frequently. Stacy Brown, on the other hand, spent much of his waking hours out by the moose.

On the following morning just as they were about to sit down to breakfast a loud halloo caused them to start up and rush down to the water's edge. The smoke from their campfire had attracted the attention of some woodsman. They saw him making his way along the shore of the lake.

"Got a snack for a hungry man?" called a cheerful voice.

"All of them you want," answered Tad. "You are just in time. We were sitting down to breakfast when you called."

"Hello, Patsey," called Cale as the man strode into camp and, with a quick, keen glance at the party, unslung his rifle and stood it against a tree.

"Hello, Cale. What's wrong?"

"Turned my ankle, that's all," growled the guide. He then introduced the newcomer as Patsey O'Rell, a timber cruiser for a big lumber company. Patsey said he was on his way in. He had been out taking a survey of some timber plots and had been out two weeks. He

had been living, to a large extent, on what the woods could supply, carrying his cooking utensils dangling from his belt. Patsey was especially solicitous over the condition of the guide. He demanded to see the ankle, and getting down on his knees examined it carefully.

"Yes, there's something broken in there," he announced. "I reckon you'd better be a leetle bit careful of that ankle."

Tad suggested that they sit down to breakfast, which suggestion Patsey accepted gratefully. There was moose steak for breakfast. When a heaping dish of it was passed to the timber cruiser he sniffed it, then tasted it, after which he gazed up with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Something familiar about this meat, eh?" he grinned. "Pretty good piece of cow meat—"

"It isn't cow meat," exclaimed Stacy, unable to contain himself longer.

"No?"

"No, sir. That's moose."

"Moose?"

"Yes, sir, and I killed him myself."

The cat was out of the bag. All the warning looks from the rest of the party went unheeded by the fat boy. Once started there was no stopping him.

"You killed him?"

"With my own hands, I did, and he was a big fellow. Why, you ought to have seen him."

"That's curious. You shot him?"

"No, I didn't, I stuck him with my knife."

"And what was the moose doing all this time?" laughed the visitor.

"He was fighting. He fought me all over the place. Would you believe it, sir, he charged me. I sidestepped just like this," explained Stacy, jumping up from the table and hopping about. "As he passed me I struck him on the jaw just like this." Stacy made a swing that turned him half way around.

"Hm-m-m! Did he feel it?"

"Did he feel it?" scoffed the fat boy pompously. "Why, sir, I knocked him down. He dropped right down on his front legs."

"I'd hate to have you hit me a punch with that fist of yours, young man," declared Patsey with a slow shake of the head.

"As I was saying, we had it hammer and tongs all over the place. I hit him on his big nose until it was sore. Did you ever see a moose with a nose-bleed?"

Patsey shook his head.

"Then you ought to have seen this fellow. I had him groggy after a while. I just played with him; then, when I got him where I wanted him, I let him have it."

"With your fist?"

"No, with my knife. I just cut him. I nearly cut his head off the first swish of the knife. He's out there now if you want to look at him."

A moment of silence followed Stacy's pompous announcement, the faces of the party wearing solemn expressions.

"I reckon you'd better come along to town with me, Cale," said Patsey, by way of changing the subject.

"That is my idea, too," agreed Butler. "He will be much better off."

Cale shook his head with emphasis.

"That will spoil your trip."

"What's the matter with the Indian?" demanded O'Rell.

"Does he know the woods sufficiently well to be able to guide us?" asked Professor Zepplin.

"Yes. Trust an Indian for knowing the woods. You couldn't lose Charlie for long at a time, if at all."

"I agree with you then, Mr. O'Rell. Mr. Vaughn can join us again when he gets well. We can agree on some point of meeting, leaving Vaughn to settle that. An excellent idea. By all means take him in with you."

Cale protested, but the others added their voices to the proposal of the timber cruiser until Cale ceased his protests.

"I don't like to be a baby," he objected.

"I should think it would be much better to be a baby, as you call it, than to take the chance of having a stiff ankle for the rest of your life. That would be serious in your calling."

"I reckon you are right," reflected the guide.

"Then it is settled. You go in with me. Can you let him have a horse? I see you have your nags with you," said O'Rell.

"Mr. Vaughn has his own pony here, too," answered Tad.

"That's good. With luck I'll have him home and in the hands of old Saw Bones before midnight."

After breakfast Tad packed the guide's kit, while Cale was giving Charlie John explicit instructions regarding the care of the party, where they were to be taken and where they were to go into camp and wait for him some ten days to two weeks later.

The guide told the Professor that, in case they got short of provisions, they could send the Indian in to any of the towns for fresh stores. A night and a half day should suffice to get them to a town almost anywhere in that time, and Charlie could be trusted to carry out his orders faithfully so long as those orders were in black and white.

All preparations were made for the journey

by Tad. He placed his own saddle on Mr. Vaughn's pony, because it was a more comfortable saddle than that owned by the guide. Finally all was ready. The boys picked up the injured man and lifted him bodily into his saddle, Patsey O'Rell regarding the proceeding with something of wonder in his eyes, for the boys did not look as if they possessed so much strength. With final instructions to Charlie, Cale rode away, O'Rell striding along by his side, leaving the Pony Rider Boys a little blue and unusually silent.

"We will cut up some of that meat, then bury the rest of the carcass before some other visitors come to camp," ordered Tad. "You shouldn't have said anything about the moose, Chunky."

"I guess I've got a right to talk about myself if I want to," retorted the fat boy.

CHAPTER XV

A DISASTROUS JOURNEY

SEVERAL days had passed, finding the Pony Rider Boys in the same camp where Cale Vaughn had left them. They had got along very well, indeed, and though Charlie John was not much of a talker, he had done his work well, taking the boys out every day for long jaunts, on which the Professor had formed the habit of accompanying them.

Professor Zepplin was finding much to interest him in the great forests, and especially in the methods pursued by woodsmen in making their way through the forests. The trees, the bushes, the foliage and the birds and animals had taken on a new meaning, a new interest to the Professor, just as these things had taken on a new and absorbing interest for the boys under his charge.

Of course Cale Vaughn was greatly missed by everyone. He was the most interesting guide that had ever accompanied them. For one thing, they had learned more from Cale than from any other guide. The only way they

could learn from Charlie John was by observation, as he never deemed it necessary to explain anything to them, for which reason they pressed him hard for information and drew him out by frequent questionings.

The Pony Rider Boys finally decided that they would like to move, so the camp was struck, their equipment packed and loaded on to the ponies. Then one morning they started out on a two days' journey, finally locating in a new camp some thirty miles from the old camp. The country had become more rugged, the rocks were higher, the country cut up by deep valleys and narrow passes. But the bracing fragrance of the spruce woods was still in their nostrils. It was a country of evergreens, of mossy silver birches and watery maples. The ground itself was sprinkled with small red berries, strewn with damp and moss-grown rocks, with the songs of the birds filling the air overhead. The Pony Rider Boys voted it the most entrancing environment in which they ever had been. They were glad they had moved on. Now they were eager to explore the new country, so a start was made on an exploring trip on the following day, but traveling was slow owing to the rugged nature of that part of the forest.

On the second day in the new camp they jour-

neyed so far to the north that they decided to make a temporary camp and spend the night, returning the next morning. The night was passed uneventfully, but upon their return to the permanent camp they were met with a most unpleasant surprise.

"Someone has been here," cried Tad the moment he came in sight of the camp.

"Thieves!" yelled Chunky.

"What—what?" demanded the Professor.

The contents of the tents lay strewn about the camp; everything was in disorder.

"Plenty bear come here," grunted Charlie after a glance at the condition of the camp.

"Bears!" cried the boys.

The Indian nodded.

"Him get plenty eat."

"Oh, pshaw! Our provisions are ruined," groaned Tad.

"Even the canned goods have been ruined," added Ned.

"Are—are my canned peaches gone?" wailed Stacy.

"You may see for yourself," answered Tad.

"This is most disconcerting," muttered the Professor. "How about the meat?"

"All gone," answered Tad.

"I reckon we shall have to live on spruce bark for the rest of our journey," averred Ned.

"We can't very well do that," answered Butler. "Let's go over the outfit and see what we really have left."

What they had was not enough to cut much figure in the face of the appetites of the Pony Rider Boys. A few of the canned things were untouched. There was coffee, though they had to scrape it up from the ground after it had been pawed over by the marauders, but the boys were glad enough to have the coffee even in such a condition. Tad said he guessed the bears had not made it unfit to drink.

Of course they had some provisions in their packs, left over from their trip into the mountains, but a careful inventory led them to the conclusion that, with the most rigid economy, they would be able to get along not longer than three days with what provisions they still had.

"I reckon I had better go out and kill another moose," decided Stacy Brown.

"You have done quite enough in that direction already," answered Tad. "We are fortunate if we don't get into trouble over that killing of yours."

"This is serious," spoke up the Professor. "What shall we do, Charlie?"

"Me kill deer," said the Indian.

"Deer are out of season. We don't want to do anything of that sort, except as a last re-

sort," replied Butler. "We simply must have some more provisions."

"Send Stacy around to the corner grocery for a fresh supply," suggested Rector.

No one laughed at Ned's silly jest. Their situation was too serious for joking.

"Charlie, how far are we from a town?" asked Tad.

"Mebby twenty, mebby thirty miles," answered the Indian, counting up on his fingers.

"What town is it?"

"Matungamook."

"That's a funny name," chuckled Stacy.

"Your name will be more funny if we don't get something to eat pretty soon," returned Tad, at which Chunky's face grew solemn. When it came to a question of food, the fat boy was deeply interested.

"That's so," nodded Rector.

"Professor, it is my opinion that we should send Charlie to—to—the place with the unpronounceable name for fresh supplies," said Tad, turning to Professor Zepplin.

"How long will it take?"

"Can you make it in two days, Charlie?"

The Indian nodded.

"Mebby more, mebby less."

"Then I guess we had better send you."

"I want to go, too," piped Chunky.

"It might not be a bad idea," agreed the Professor.

"Do you need any one, Charlie?" asked Tad.

"Me take fat boy. Fat boy help carry grub."

"He will carry the large part of it inside of him if you don't watch out, and that won't do us any good," declared Ned Rector.

"Then you had better take two ponies," suggested Butler.

"Me walk," answered the Indian.

"Just as you choose," agreed the Professor. "I would suggest, though, that you take a horse. You won't be able to carry enough provisions otherwise."

"Me walk," insisted Charlie John.

"Let him walk," urged Ned. "He will carry as much as a horse, and Stacy's mount will take care of the rest."

"I am not sure that we ought to let Chunky go," mused Tad. "He may get into further trouble, and Charlie might not be able to get him out of it."

"Me take care fat boy," answered Charlie John confidently.

"All right, Charlie. We will hold you responsible. Get back as soon as you can. Shall you see Mr. Vaughn?"

The Indian shook his head. Mr. Vaughn, as they understood it, had gone to another

place. They hoped to see him back at the camp again ere many days had passed.

"Get your packs ready, Stacy," advised Ned.

"I will look out for that, Ned," answered Tad. "I know what they need for carrying the stuff. You and the Professor might make out a list of supplies needed while I am getting the other things ready."

This the Professor did, with the assistance of Rector and Walter Perkins, Stacy Brown changing his clothes so that he might be more presentable upon entering a town. Frequent consultations with Tad were had, however, as to what was needed for the outfit. Tad had ideas and he expressed them forcibly.

Finally all was in readiness, the Indian and the boy taking barely enough provisions to last them until they should have reached their destination, probably on the following morning.

Good-byes were said and Stacy, with Charlie John striding ahead, leading the way, left the camp. They were quickly swallowed up in the dense forest. Tad stood gazing after them, a thoughtful expression on his face.

"I don't know whether we have done the wise thing or not," he mused.

"I'll go you a new sombrero that Chunky gets mixed up in some sort of a mess before he gets back to this camp," offered Ned Rector.

"He is in good hands," answered the Professor.

"I guess he will be all right," decided Tad. "The guide has nothing else to do except to look after Stacy until they get to town. He surely will not get into mischief there."

"Not get into mischief there?" jeered Ned. "I should like to see the place in which Stacy Brown couldn't get into trouble."

"I am quite sure that Stacy will be careful," observed the Professor smilingly.

"If you fellows will lend a hand we will try to put this camp to rights," said Tad. "It looks as if it had been struck by a Kansas cyclone, except that the trees are all standing in this locality."

"I agree with you. Where shall we begin?" asked Walter.

"You get the tent belongings back in place and I will gather up what is left of the provisions. This is a fine mess of porridge."

"It wouldn't be so bad if we had some porridge," declared Rector.

"There is another thing to be taken into consideration," reminded Tad, pausing in his work. "We must not leave the camp unguarded again. We must also keep watch during the night. Those bears may come back. They appear to like our grub."

"You think they may come back with some of their friends?" questioned Perkins.

"I wouldn't be surprised if they did," answered Tad with a smile. "But they will get a hot reception if they do. I can promise them that much."

"I hope they come back, then," laughed Ned. "Some nice bear steak would not go so badly just now, in the present state of our pantry and pork barrel."

"That's so," agreed Tad. "One steak would be enough. We don't need quite as many bears as visited us the first time."

That day came to a close quickly. Tad remained up, staying on guard until three o'clock in the morning, when he called Ned to take his place. Ned could be depended upon to keep a vigilant watch. As it turned out, there was no need for a watch of any kind. No bears appeared, nor was the camp molested in any other way.

That day was spent by the boys in making short excursions into the woods, blazing their way, making trails, and putting into practice the theories in woodcraft learned from Cale Vaughn. Fortunately none of the party got lost. Tad saw to it that they did not get far enough away for that. Besides, he had agreed with the Professor, who remained to watch the

camp, to have him blow a horn once every hour. That would serve to guide the boys back in case they lost their way, which they did not.

The second morning arrived with no sign of the Indian or of Chunky. This did not cause serious alarm, but when three days had elapsed, and still no travelers, Tad Butler began to get uneasy. This uneasiness on his part was shared by Professor Zepplin, while Ned Rector's face wore an "I-told-you-so" expression.

It was somewhere about three o'clock on the morning of the fourth day when Tad, who was on watch, caught a sound that he thought was caused by a horse crashing through the bushes. The boy did not arouse the camp, but stood waiting with rifle held at ready in the crook of his right arm.

A few moments later Charlie John burst into the camp astride of a pony, white lather standing out all over the body of the little animal. Charlie was alone.

"Where is Stacy Brown?" demanded Tad sharply.

"Fat boy Matungamook," grunted the Indian, slipping from the pony. He thrust a folded sheet of brown wrapping paper toward Tad. The boy now knew that something had happened to Chunky. Quickly opening the paper and holding it down in the light of the

campfire, Tad read what was written on the sheet. This is the message he read written in a lead pencil scrawl:

"Come quickly. I'm in jail in 'Ungamook.
"STACY."

"Professor!" yelled Tad Butler excitedly.

CHAPTER XVI

BAD NEWS FROM THE FRONT

"P-R-O-OFESSOR!"

Professor Zepplin came tumbling from his tent clad in his pajamas, wild-eyed, his whiskers bristling excitedly.

"What is it?"

A few seconds behind the Professor came Ned Rector, and behind him Walter Perkins, each in a similar state of undress.

"Trouble in plenty," answered Tad, thrusting the piece of brown wrapping paper toward the Professor.

The Professor snatched the paper and holding it towards the fire as Tad had done, peered, rubbed his eyes, then peered again.

"I—I can't read it. I'm not awake yet. What does it say?" he demanded impatiently.

"Stacy Brown is in jail, fellows," answered Tad Butler solemnly.

"In jail?" gasped the two boys.

"Yes."

"What's this? What's this?" cried the Professor.

"How—how do you know?" stammered Walter Perkins.

"I have his word for it. This note says so, and it is in Stacy's handwriting. He was very much excited when he wrote it."

A tense silence followed Tad's announcement, broken a few seconds later by a loud laugh from Ned Rector.

"What did I tell you?" he jeered.

"Perhaps Charlie can tell us what has happened," suggested Walter.

Tad turned sharply to the Indian. Charlie was nearer to being excited than the boys ever before had seen him.

"Will you be good enough to explain this affair?" demanded Tad.

"Man git um."

"What man?"

"Me not know."

"But what for?" cried the Professor.

"Charlie not know."

"Have they got Stacy in jail now?" begged Walter.

"Man take um away."

"How did you get this letter, then?"

"Man bring um to me. Say take to you. Fat boy, him scared."

"I should think he had reason to be," muttered Tad. "What do you think, Professor?"

"I can't think. My head is in a whirl."

"What had Master Stacy been doing, Charlie?" demanded Tad, again turning to the guide.

"Me not know. Me get stuff. Me bring um here. While me get stuff, fat boy go hotel. Me not see um again. Me hurry, ride fast, make pony all soap like wash tub."

"When—when did you leave there?" questioned the Professor.

"Last night."

"Then you rode all night?"

"Ride fast all night. Pony git sick in the legs and fall down once. Me not care. Why Charlie care? Fat boy git trouble plenty. No care horse die. He say come quick, eh?"

"Yes, that is what he says," answered Tad, smiling faintly.

"Then come. Mebby Charlie kill horse. Charlie not care for horse. Charlie like um fat boy."

"Professor, there is only one thing to be done. Some of us must go back there at once. Perhaps you and I had better start."

Professor Zepplin reflected.

"It would be better were we all to go. I don't care to leave one or two of you boys here."

"But that will detain us too long," objected Butler.

"That makes no difference. Matters no doubt will be held in abeyance until our arrival. Then, again, we may not get back here at once."

"If that is going to be done we had better leave our provisions here. We can't afford to be burdened with them on our way back. We shall no doubt return this way, when we can pick the stuff up. We will take enough for our meals on the way, but that must be all. Have you decided that we shall all go, Professor?" questioned Tad.

"Yes, yes, by all means. Make haste!"

"Charlie, help strike the tents. We've got to take them along and our kits," ordered Tad. "Boys, sail in and help Charlie. I will cache the provisions and mark the trees so we shall know where to find them when we return."

"Oh, this is too bad," mourned Walter.

"Serves the little rascal right," retorted Rector. "Maybe this will teach him a lesson. What do you think it is, Tad?"

"I am sure I don't know. I haven't the least idea what he could have done that would have caused him to be arrested."

"Well, no use to guess about it. We shall know when we get there—"

"Go dress yourselves. You can't go that way," declared Tad, pausing long enough to

observe that the two boys were still in their pajamas. Thus admonished, they hurried to their tent, returning very quickly with their clothes on. Then the boys got to work with a will. While Stacy's pony, that Charlie had ridden back, was lying down resting, Charlie got the other ponies in readiness, strapping the packs to their backs as fast as he could work. Charlie John was in as much of a hurry as the rest. The Indian had grown fond of Stacy Brown, and felt very bad to know that the fat boy had got into such trouble. Charlie held the law in deep awe.

Daylight was upon them long before they were ready to start for the village of Matungamook. Ned Rector declared that, if Chunky's offense was as ugly as the name of the town, nothing short of hanging would be bad enough for him.

"I think we are ready now," said Tad finally, walking slowly about the camp to make sure that nothing had been left. He had laid aside a small supply of food for their use while on the way out, deciding that they could get all they wanted to eat when they got to the town.

At last they were in their saddles. Charlie had mounted Stacy's pony. The little animal appeared to be weak in the knees. Tad, good horseman that he was, felt sure the pony never

would be able to make the journey without giving out before they had reached their destination.

"Charlie, you get on my horse. I will take a run. That pony can't carry you."

"No, me run," answered the Indian, grasping the bridle rein and starting off.

"Come back here! I was going to foot it," Tad called after him.

"Me run. Me said me run," flung back the guide, increasing his swift stride to a long lope.

"Hold on, hold on," cried the Professor. "You will have us lost in five minutes at this rate. You keep in sight of us all the time. Remember, we do not know our way to the town."

Charlie John slowed down with evident reluctance. The party now settled down to a slow but steady trot. The guide was choosing the easiest trail possible, knowing that better time would be made that way than by a shorter cut over rougher ground. Had he been alone he could have reached his destination in much better time by taking a course as the crow flies, regardless of the roughness of the trail.

The party did not halt until shortly after midday, when they stopped to give the stock rest and water and to take a bite on their own account.

"Chunky ought to get about twenty years for causing us all this trouble," declared Ned during the halt.

"You wouldn't think so, perhaps, were you in Chunky's place," rebuked Tad.

"But I wouldn't be."

"You can't tell. You may be some time; then you will be mighty glad to have your friends hurry to your assistance."

"Yes, but what are you going to do when you get there?" insisted Ned.

"We can tell better when we get there."

"If he has done something very bad he will be punished for it, that's all."

"Stacy hasn't done anything so terrible. Take my word for that," answered Butler sharply. "You will find that he has unwittingly got himself into difficulties. Chunky isn't bad. He is imprudent and he likes to talk and glorify himself and exaggerate things. I shouldn't be surprised if that were where the trouble lies in this instance."

"Ah! I have an idea," cried Ned.

"I thought you would get something through your head after a while," chuckled Tad.

"What time shall we reach our destination, Charlie?" called the Professor.

"Mebby soon, mebby not so soon," was the indefinite reply of the Indian. Tad laughed.

"Is that perfectly clear?" he asked.

"About as clear as a watering hole on the plains after the cattle have drunk their fill," replied Rector. Professor Zepplin smiled grimly, but he did not seek for further information at that time.

Late in the afternoon Stacy's pony went lame, and a halt was made while Tad examined the little animal's foot. He found that a sharp sliver had been driven into the frog. Blood was streaming from the wound. With a pair of forceps the boy carefully extracted the splinter, then washed the wound out with an ointment that he carried with him.

"Will he be able to go on?" questioned Walter.

"Yes. He will be lame, but it isn't half so bad as if he had gone lame in the shoulder. We must slow down for half an hour or so, and I think you will find he will go along better after that."

It was as Tad had said. The pony began to show less lameness in exactly thirty minutes from the time the boy had removed the hardwood splinter. In an hour, though weary, the pony was walking as naturally as ever.

Just before dark another stop was made. All hands were tired by this time, the ponies more so than their riders. Saddles, packs and

bridles were removed, giving the stock a chance to lie down and get all the rest that the halt would permit.

Tad suggested that they would gain time by stopping at least two hours, giving the horses a chance to get a little sleep. The others agreed to this with poor grace. They were in a hurry to be on, still, they realized that Tad was the best judge of horseflesh in the party.

It was ten o'clock at night when they again took up their journey. There was a bright moon high up in the heavens, but it did little good in guiding them, as only now and then did a bar of light penetrate the denseness of the forest. Ned went to sleep in his saddle shortly after midnight and fell forward on his pony's neck when the animal stumbled over an unseen tree trunk. It gave the boy a sudden jolt, but was attended with no more severe consequences, although it aroused the laughter of his companions.

"Matungamook!" grunted Charlie John, halting sharply at half past two o'clock in the morning.

"Where?" questioned Tad.

The guide pointed. Butler could not see anything that looked like a town, but the guide appeared to be sure of himself.

"How far?" he asked.

"Mebby mile, mebby half mile," grunted Charlie.

"Professor, if Charlie is right, the town lies over in that valley. I don't suppose it will do any good to go in now. Everyone must be asleep. There is not a light to be seen."

"No, we would gain nothing by so doing," replied Professor Zepplin.

"Then what do you propose—to sit down on the ground here and wait for daylight?" demanded Rector.

"I would suggest that we pitch a camp right here, if there is water handy," said Tad.

"Plenty water," the guide informed them.

"Very good, Tad; go ahead."

Ned and Walter were too sleepy to be of much use. Tad kept stirring them up, but without results. He and the guide and the Professor were very much awake, and within the hour had pitched two tents and built a campfire, beside which they were warming themselves while a pot of hot water was steaming over the fire for an early morning cup of tea.

Tad was waiting impatiently for morning. The others wished it were much further away, for then they would have a longer time to sleep. Tad was worried, too, about Chunky, who, he had every reason to believe, was in serious difficulties.

After a time Butler lay down, but he did not sleep at all. Instead he lay gazing out and up at the stars, waiting for the day to break. Dawn would soon be there. He knew that by the faint twittering of the birds in the trees and that restless stirring of nature—the advance guard of a new-born day.

CHAPTER XVII

CHUNKY IN A PREDICAMENT

TAD got breakfast before any of the others awakened. Even Charlie John was sleeping soundly after his two days and nights on the trail, and it was not until Tad dropped the frying-pan that the Indian woke up.

Tad nodded to Charlie to call the others. Ned and Walter got up complaining at being disturbed. At breakfast it was decided that Tad and Charlie should go into town to find out what trouble Stacy was in, and the two started shortly after breakfast. The public house, bearing a sign painted in yellow letters reading, "Mountain View House," caught the glances of Charlie.

"Um git fat boy there."

"That is where we will go then," answered Tad, turning towards the hotel. There were few persons on the streets of the little mountain village, though later in the season many summer visitors would be there, filling the hotel and the boarding houses, for Matungamook was

popular with many during the hot months of summer.

Tad entered the hotel. The only man he saw was the porter.

"I am looking for a young man named Brown —Stacy Brown—who came to town with this guide after provisions. I understand he has fallen into some trouble," said Tad.

"He belong to your outfit?" asked the porter, eyeing Tad with impassive face.

"Yes, sir."

"I reckon he's the fellow Jed Whitman took in yesterday, ain't he?"

"I don't know who took him in. Who is Jed Whitman?"

"Game warden for this section."

"Oh! Why did he take Brown?"

"Violation of the game laws. He shot a moose down in Moquin Valley."

Tad Butler understood now. He had suspected the truth almost from the beginning. Chunky had been talking again.

"Will you tell me where the jail is?"

"Jail? There ain't no jail here. I reckon Jed's got the younker over to his house. He's waitin' for Squire Halliday to come back. The squire's been down to Bangor, else they would have tried the younker yesterday."

Tad was thankful for the business that had

called the squire to Bangor, and he hoped the justice would return in a pleasant frame of mind.

"Will you tell me where Mr. Whitman lives?"

The porter stepped out into the street, and, pointing down to the lower end, said:

"That yaller house on the right."

"Thank you," answered Tad, starting off. "Charlie, do you understand now? They arrested Stacy for killing that moose. The game warden has him at his house down yonder. Master Stacy is not in jail at all. Now you run back to the camp and tell Professor Zepplin. Tell him he had better come in and wait for me at the hotel. I will meet him there in about an hour. Do you understand?"

"Me know. Game warden git fat boy. Fat boy kill moose." Charlie made a motion of drawing a knife across his throat.

"Yes. And the game warden has him at his home."

Charlie started off at a lope. Tad turned and continued on down the street toward the yellow house, where he rang the bell. The door was opened by a tall, raw-boned, keen-eyed man, who himself looked as though he might be a mountain ranger.

"Is Mr. Whitman at home?" asked Tad politely.

"I'm Whitman. What you want?"

"I came to see if you had Stacy Brown here?"

"I reckon I have. Who be you?"

Butler introduced himself, at the same time stating that the rest of their party was encamped about a mile from the village. He asked why Stacy was being held, and was told what he already knew.

"How did you know that he had killed a moose?" asked Tad.

"Well, I reckon every feller in town knew about that before the younker had been here half an hour," grinned the warden.

Tad understood. No need to ask any more questions along that line.

"Is there any way in which this matter may be squared?" asked Tad.

"I reckon the only way is to wait for Squire Halliday's decision," answered Jed with a twinkle in his eyes.

"I didn't mean that I wanted to try to bribe you," laughed Tad, with slightly heightened color. "I thought perhaps an explanation might be all that was necessary."

"What is your explanation?"

Tad's bump of caution swelled. He declined to discuss the matter so long as Stacy was to be brought before the justice. He asked if he

might see Chunky, and was told that the fat boy was asleep. Jed offered, however, to wake the fat boy up, which he did. Chunky lost no time when told that a boy named Butler was downstairs waiting to see him.

"Chunky would sleep if the world were coming to an end," muttered Tad.

The object of his thoughts bolted into the room only about half clad.

"Oh, Tad!" wailed Stacy. "I'm in an awful fix! I've got myself arrested, all on account of that bull moose."

"No. On account of your talk. It's a pity you aren't tongue-tied sometimes."

"Have you come to take me away?"

"I have come hoping to get you away."

"Wait till I get my coat and hat and I'll go with you."

"Perhaps you had better speak to Mr. Whitman about that first," suggested Butler.

Whitman shook his head.

"Can't let him go. He's in my charge until the justice disposes of the case."

The fat boy's jaw fell perceptibly.

"What will the justice be likely to do with him?"

"How do I know?"

"What can he do if Mr. Brown is found guilty?"

"Send him to jail, or—"

"Oh, wow!" wailed Stacy.

"Fine him or discharge him. I've tried to make young Brown as comfortable as possible, and we've had a pretty good visit, haven't we, Stacy?"

"Ye—yes. You have been like a father to me, but—"

"But what?" twinkled Jed.

"But I'm held up."

"Yes, I reckon you are. I am sorry, Mr. Butler, but I couldn't help it. When some folks came over and told me there was a fellow at the Mountain View who had just killed a moose down Moquin way, I just strolled over town to look into the matter. It didn't take me long to find out what I wanted to know. I saw my duty clear and I did it."

"What did he say?" asked Tad.

"Oh, he told me the whole story," smiled Jed.

"You bet I wouldn't if I had known who you were," retorted Stacy indignantly. "That was taking a mean advantage of a fellow."

"Well, you weren't making much of a secret of the killing yourself, it seemed to me."

Tad nodded at Stacy as much as to say, "You see what comes from talking too much." Stacy lowered his gaze to the floor. His face was very red.

"What time do you look for the justice to return?"

"Squire Halliday? He's home now. He will be at his office about eight o'clock, I reckon. I'll take the young man right over. I don't suppose you want to bail him out?"

"No," reflected Tad. "I think we will leave him with you for the present."

Chunky bristled, but restrained himself, though he would have liked to fall on Tad Butler and pummel him.

"There seems to be nothing more for me to do here, so I will go back to my friends. I am sure we are very grateful to you for your kindness to Mr. Brown, Mr. Whitman."

"Not at all. All in the line of my duty."

"By the way, where is the justice's office?"

"Next door beyond the hotel. You can't miss it. There's a sign on the window near two feet high. But I'd advise you not to try to monkey with the squire. He's touchy."

"I don't intend to monkey with the squire, thank you," answered Tad, bowing himself from the room, followed by the big, staring eyes of Stacy Brown.

Butler walked slowly towards the hotel where he was to meet the Professor, and Tad's face wore a suppressed grin in spite of the seriousness of the situation.

"I thought as much. Still, it isn't fair. He can't hold Chunky on that. Why, the boy was defending himself. If he had told the truth about the affair I am sure they never would have taken him. In all probability he told Jed Whitman a tale of his own bravery and prowess that simply forced that officer to take him in. Well, we shall see."

Professor Zepplin, with Rector and Walter Perkins, was already at the hotel when Tad returned. The Professor was nervously stroking his whiskers.

"Did you see him?" he demanded.

Butler nodded.

"I had a talk with him."

"Well, what about it?"

"I fear we shall not be able to do anything. The justice, Squire Halliday, is a queer old fellow, I guess. There is no telling what he may or may not do, but I think, after he hears the true story, he will let Chunky go with a warning."

"It was on account of the moose?" asked Walter.

"Yes."

"Outrageous! Outrageous!" growled Professor Zepplin. "I'll wager these Mainers don't let a moose get by them, open or closed season."

"I should think not," agreed Tad.

"Have you seen the justice?" asked Ned.

"I have not. Nor do I intend to until I see him in the court room," answered Butler. "I am not looking for more trouble. We have enough on hand as it is."

"What time is the case to be called?" asked the Professor.

"Eight o'clock. It is seven o'clock now, so we have an hour to wait."

"How is Stacy taking it?" asked Walter.

"About as usual. He is mad. I think he would try to fight the game warden if he dared," smiled Butler.

"Then he is not locked up?" questioned the Professor.

"Oh, no. I should judge that he is being treated as a member of the family. Mr. Whitman naturally doesn't want Stacy to get out of his sight, now that he has detained him. Well, I'm going out for a walk. Who is going with me?"

"I am," answered Ned promptly.

The two boys returned a few minutes before eight o'clock. Calling for Walter and the Professor they strolled into the office of the justice, where a dozen or more men of the village had already gathered. These eyed the Pony Rider Boys with no little interest, know-

ing who the boys were by this time, and pretty much everything else about them that any one in the Maine woods did know.

The justice, a little, weazened, irritable fellow, came in shortly afterwards. The boys eyed him inquiringly.

"I'd hate to have him sit in judgment on me," whispered Tad to Ned Rector.

"So should I," agreed Ned.

Stacy Brown and Jed Whitman entered the court room at this moment, Stacy big-eyed, glancing apprehensively about. His glances caught sight of his friends. Then Stacy threw out his chest pompously. Even though he was virtually a prisoner he felt a certain pride in the thought that all this assemblage was on his account. Chunky walked over and shook hands with his friends.

"Any word you want to send to the friends at home, in case they hang you?" asked Ned.

"The judge won't do anything," answered the fat boy confidently.

"Anyway, I am going to send the story to the paper at home," declared Ned.

"Don't you dare do anything of the sort. I'll thrash you, Ned Rector, if you do that," threatened Stacy, his face very red.

"Where is the prisoner?" snapped the justice.

Whitman nodded towards Stacy.

"Bring him here! Why is he allowed to roam about the room at will?"

Jed beckoned to the fat boy, who walked over and sat down on a bench.

"Get up!" commanded the justice. "Now, Mr. Whitman, we will hear from you."

In the squire's happy-go-lucky way of conducting the hearing, he did not require Brown to testify under oath. It was a hearing typical of the country districts.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE VERDICT OF THE COURT

"I CHARGE this young man, Stacy Brown, with having violated the game laws by killing a bull moose down in Moquin Valley on the sixteenth day of June," announced the warden.

"What evidence have you of the fact?" demanded the justice.

"His own admissions."

"To whom?"

"Pretty nearly every person in the village. He told them all about it at the hotel. Word was brought to me and I went there. He repeated his story to me in great detail."

"What was done with the carcass?" demanded the justice.

"Part of it was eaten, the rest buried, according to the boy's statement."

"Did he take the antlers?"

"No, the antlers were buried. It seems the guide of the party was to return later and get the antlers out, after the season opens in October."

"Who was the guide?"

"Cale Vaughn. He is at home laid up with a broken ankle, else I should have had him here to give evidence, and perhaps to answer for the killing of the moose."

"He had nothing to do with the killing, did he?"

"Not according to the boy's story."

"Then this court has nothing to do with Cale Vaughn in the present issue. The question is, did the accused kill a moose on the date mentioned in the complaint? I will hear from some of our citizens. Did any other person present in this court hear the statements attributed to the boy Brown?"

Several voices answered in the affirmative. The justice called three men to the stand, one after the other. Each told the same story, the Pony Rider Boys listening with close attention.

"Stacy didn't leave much to the imagination, did he?" whispered Tad in the ear of Ned Rector.

"I should say he didn't. But this must be another moose that he is talking about. This is a brand-new story we are hearing."

"It's the same old moose, but with new trimmings," answered Tad.

The evidence of the villagers fully confirmed

what Jed Whitman had said; in fact, it was wholly convincing. During all the talking Chunky had stood before the deal table behind which sat the justice, the boy twisting and untwisting his weather-worn sombrero, now and then gazing about him with wide, soulful eyes.

"Reminds me of a yearling calf about to be turned into veal," muttered Ned. Squire Halliday heard the whisper, though not catching the words, and threatened to eject the party from the room if anyone spoke without being asked.

"Stacy Brown, stand up!" commanded the squire.

"I—I am standing up," stammered Chunky. "I've been standing up all the time."

"Silence!"

Chunky shrank within himself.

"The accused will now give his version of the affair," announced the justice.

The accused grew red in the face, but did not speak.

"Give your testimony."

"Tell the court your side of the story," directed Jed.

"I—I didn't mean to do it," stammered the fat boy.

"Then you admit it?" snapped the squire.

"I—I had to do it, or he would have killed me," protested the fat boy.

"Explain."

"I was standing against a tree. I looked up and saw that big thing standing in front of me. I was scared stiff—"

"Moderate your language, young man," commanded the court. "A respectful attitude must be maintained toward this court, or the offender will be severely punished. Proceed."

"He came for me with his head down. I fell over. He butted his head against the tree where I had been standing. Then he fell over, too. I guess the bump must have given him a headache for he didn't get up. I got to my feet and saw him lying there. Then I happened to think of my knife. I jumped in and cut his throat. You see, I was excited."

"Ah!" breathed the court.

"Yes, sir," exclaimed Stacy, warming to his subject. "I cut that moose's throat. I almost cut his head off. I wasn't a bit afraid of that fellow with a back like a giraffe, and ears like a mullen leaf."

"You were not afraid," nodded the justice.

"No, sir, I wasn't. Why, when I first set eyes on him, I just went for him like this." Stacy squared off, and swinging his arms he advanced, sidestepped and ducked. "No, sir, I wasn't afraid. I'm not afraid of any animal that runs on four legs. I made up my

mind that he was going to be mine. I wanted a piece of steak from that old moose."

"You could have got away from him, had you wished, could you not?" questioned the justice.

"Got away from him? Of course I could. But why should I want to get away? I wanted him, and I got him."

"Just so," answered the justice dryly. "Who are the members of your party?"

Stacy named them, pointing to each one, the justice eyeing them frowningly. Tad had groaned when Stacy told his story—his second story. He saw that the boy had made his own case as bad as it could be made, through his desire to glorify himself.

"Thaddeus Butler, stand up!" commanded the justice. "What do you know about this case, young man?" he demanded.

"No more than you already have heard, sir."

"Were you a witness to the killing?"

"No, sir."

"When was your attention first attracted to it?"

"When I heard my companion call out."

"Was the moose dead when you reached the scene?"

"Practically."

"Brown had killed it?"

"I supposed so."

"What did he tell you?"

"Something like what he has told to you. I guess the main facts were somewhat similar," answered Tad with a faint smile.

"You ate some of the meat?"

"We did."

"Did your guide, Cale Vaughn, approve of what had been done?"

"He did not. He said it was against the law to kill moose at this time of the year."

"Did he bury the antlers, proposing to return later and get them?"

"We buried the antlers, sir. The moose was dead. No further harm could be done, it seemed to me."

"No, you are right. You had already done quite enough. You had violated the law. You could violate it no further except by killing another moose or a deer. That will be all. Professor Zepplin, stand up. You are in charge of this party, are you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you think you are doing your duty as a law-abiding citizen by permitting one under your charge to violate one of our most sacred laws?"

The Professor's whiskers bristled.

"I do not see how I could have prevented this, sir."

"A proper supervision of your party surely would have kept them from breaking the laws, no matter how lawless—"

"My young men are not lawless, sir," retorted Professor Zepplin indignantly. "They are most respectable, law-abiding young men. What occurred was accidental. I am thoroughly convinced of that. Statements to the contrary are untrue, and—"

"Silence!" thundered Squire Halliday.

"I demand the right to be heard in this matter. If we cannot get justice in this court we shall seek it elsewhere. My young men have done nothing to warrant this high-handed proceeding. One of my party was attacked by an angry beast. He defended himself to the best of his ability. Had he not killed the moose the probability is that the beast would have killed him. Even had this not been the case one or the other of us would have been obliged to shoot the moose to protect ourselves."

The Professor was angry and made no attempt to disguise his feelings. He considered the detention of Stacy Brown a high-handed proceeding and he resented it.

"I have nothing more to say at the present time. I may have occasion to remark further at another time," was the way Professor Zepplin wound up.

"The case appears plain enough. I shall have to give the young man the limit of the law. I am sorry that there is a limit," said the court.

"What? You are going to punish him?" demanded the Professor, bristling.

"Certainly. He admits killing the moose, does he not?"

"Yes," assented the Professor.

"Then I have no alternative. I must pronounce sentence."

Stacy's face grew suddenly pale.

"Stacy Brown, I fine you one hundred dollars and costs. The costs will probably reach twenty-five dollars. Pay your fine or take a jail sentence, whichever you may prefer."

"Oh, help!" moaned the fat boy, gazing about him helplessly.

CHAPTER XIX

PAYING THE FIDDLER

"ONE hundred and twenty-five dollars!" groaned Tad.

"It's outrageous," muttered Professor Zepplin.

"Squire, there's a little matter of three dollars and a half for board of the young man at my house that I reckon you've forgotten to figure in," reminded Jed Whitman.

"I will take account of that," answered the justice, making a calculation on the table-top. "The total figure will be one hundred twenty-eight dollars and fifty cents," he announced.

Chunky turned a smiling face towards the Professor.

"Professor, can you cross my palm for one-twenty-eight fifty?" he asked. "I don't have the amount with me at the moment."

The Pony Rider Boys gazed at each other with troubled eyes.

"Sir, will you permit us to retire to another room to talk this matter over?" asked the Professor.

"Yes, but be brief. I can't afford to waste more time on this case. Mr. Whitman, will you conduct the prisoner and his friends to the back room? You will be responsible for Brown. See to it that he doesn't get away."

The party filed solemnly into the back room, which proved to be a store-room. There were empty cases, an old drum stove and a lot of rubbish, but no chairs. The boys sat down on the boxes, and fixed their eyes expectantly on Professor Zepplin.

"Thank goodness that business is over," exclaimed Stacy Brown.

"Young man, don't be in too great a hurry to congratulate yourself. The 'business' may not be ended. That remains to be seen," said the Professor.

"Wha—what do you mean?" questioned Stacy apprehensively.

"We have to pay the fiddler first. Let us see if we are going to be able to do so."

Professor Zepplin thrust a hand under his outside belt, drawing from his money belt a small package of folded bills. These he counted in the faint light from a dirty window. He counted the bills over a second time, then a third, growing more agitated with each count.

"Haven't you enough?" asked Tad, stepping over to the Professor.

"I have only seventy-five dollars," answered the Professor.

"I have some money," offered Tad.

"How much?"

Tad emptied his pockets with the result that he was able to hand over fifteen dollars.

"That leaves a balance of thirty-eight dollars to be raised," announced the Professor.

"And fifty cents," added Ned. "I think I may be able to scrape up a few dollars."

"So can I," added Walter Perkins.

Between them they were able to make the sum total one hundred dollars, leaving twenty-eight dollars and fifty cents still to be raised. The boys groaned.

"There is one way out of it," spoke up Tad.

"What is that?" questioned the Professor, brightening.

"Let Stacy go to jail," answered Butler.

"I—I don't want to go to jail. I won't go to jail," wailed the fat boy indignantly.

"You will unless we can raise the money," answered the Professor sternly. "Were it not for the disgrace of it, I should be in favor of letting you do that very thing. It might teach you a useful lesson."

"I don't need the lesson. How would you like that kind of a lesson?" demanded Chunky belligerently.

"Like yourself I hardly think I need it," grinned the Professor.

"Wait," said Tad. "I will see what I can do." Stepping to the door he called Jed Whitman.

"Mr. Whitman," said Tad, "we find ourselves rather hard pressed for money just now. You see, we had not looked for anything of this sort."

"How much have you?" asked the warden.

"We have a hundred dollars. If you will trust us for the balance we give you our word that it will be sent as soon as we can get our next remittance from home."

"Can't do it," replied Jed, with an emphatic shake of the head.

"Oh, yes you can. You only think you can't. Nothing is impossible."

"If that's so, then you git out and raise the money," grinned the game warden.

Even this did not stop Tad Butler. The freckles were glowing on Tad's flushed face, but the boy was not in the least disconcerted.

"Please ask the justice if he will trust us for the balance, provided we pay him a hundred dollars?"

Whitman considered briefly, then stepped out into the other room. He returned very shortly with the information that Squire Halliday said

the entire amount must be paid or the accused would have to go to jail. Stacy would be sent down to Bangor that very day.

"If he is, there will be an uproar in this town that will be heard all the way down the line, ending in the governor's mansion," warned Tad Butler significantly.

"Say, young fellow, what are you getting at?" demanded Whitman.

"A settlement of this business. We have a hundred dollars, the full amount of the outrageous fine imposed upon Stacy Brown. We have offered to make good the costs as soon as we can get a remittance from home. But I have a proposal to make to you."

"What is it?"

"We will pay the money, the fine, turning over one of our ponies to you to be held as security until our remittance gets here from home. If you will take my advice you will make this deal with Squire What's-His-Name and give Brown his discharge."

Once more the warden considered, pondering over all that Tad Butler had said to him. Perhaps these boys might raise an unpleasant rumpus at headquarters. Yes, there could be no harm in accepting the proposition provided the squire were willing. It seemed that the squire was open to argument as presented by Jed

Whitman, and the latter returned quickly with the welcome information that Tad's proposal had been accepted.

"Make out a receipt for the hundred," he said.

"Tad, you are a much better business man than am I," approved the Professor.

"Am I free?" asked Stacy.

"For the present," answered Tad. "We are going to turn your pony over to Mr. Whitman to hold until we can pay the rest of the money."

"Give my pony to him?" cried the fat boy. "No, you don't! I guess I won't let you do that—not if I am able to fight. That pony stays with me, and don't you forget it."

"Chunky, now don't you get excited. You might get something you wouldn't like."

"You threatening me?" demanded Stacy belligerently.

"You know I am not. It is a question of your doing as you are told, or of accompanying Mr. Whitman to jail. Which shall it be?"

"I don't want to go to jail, but I want my pony."

"You are the most unreasonable boy I ever knew. But we won't argue it."

"Why don't you let him have your horse?" demanded Stacy.

"I would if it were my case. You got into

this difficulty. You must do your share towards getting out of it. Wait, I will give Mr. Whitman an order for the pony."

This done, Jed strode away through the village, and the boys filed out from the office of the justice of the peace. The villagers had departed, leaving Squire Halliday alone in his office. He did not even look up when the party passed through his room. Stacy halted when they reached the street.

"I guess I'll go into the hotel and get some breakfast now. I haven't had anything to eat this morning."

"Have you the price?" questioned Tad.

"No, I guess you will cross my palm for my breakfast, won't you?"

"I guess not," answered Butler with emphasis. "I haven't a cent."

"But I'm hungry. I want something to eat."

"I have ten cents," announced Walter. "Stacy may have that if he wants it."

"Let me have it," commanded Tad. "I don't dare trust him with all that money for fear he will overload his stomach. You walk on, Stacy, while I get something for you."

Tad returned with two sandwiches, which Stacy snatched from his hand, and, sitting right down on the edge of the boardwalk, he began greedily devouring them.

"Where do we come in on the eat question?" demanded Rector.

"We don't come in," replied Tad. "We shall have to fast until we get a remittance from home."

"Isn't there anything to eat in the camp?"

"Coffee and about enough other stuff to take care of Charlie John. He mustn't know what a predicament we are in."

"How—how long have we got to fast?" stammered Walter.

"I should say about a week, perhaps a little longer," answered Tad Butler, with a mirthless smile.

A groan went up from the Pony Rider Boys.

"That means we shall all starve to death," growled Ned Rector. "We can't stand it. I'm going to look for a job."

"A fine mess you have gotten us into, Stacy Brown," complained Walter.

The Professor cleared his throat. His opportunity was at hand.

"Stacy, I wish you to come here—in fact, I wish you boys to listen to what I have to say."

The Professor's face wore a grave expression as the boys gathered about him.

"Now, Stacy," began Professor Zepplin not unkindly, "I have been much concerned for some time over your wicked habit of exaggerat-

ing—or to put it more bluntly—your habit of lying."

"Why, Professor, I—" began Stacy.

The Professor raised a hand for silence.

"None of us believed you told the exact truth about killing the moose. It is doubtful if you have yet told the whole truth concerning it. You can see one evil effect of your falsehoods in the bitter experience we have just gone through. I have no doubt that if you had simply said that you killed the animal in self-defense and explained exactly how you did it, you would have been free of any fine. Besides, had we not been here, you would have gone to jail. Still, the trouble you have put us to is a trifle when compared to the evil you are doing. You may think these exaggerations are all very funny, and, while I don't believe you intended to do any harm, you must remember that a lie is a lie. Give up this abominable habit, Stacy. That is all I have to say at present. Next time I probably shall act, and with less consideration for your feelings," finished the Professor.

For the moment Stacy Brown seemed impressed, and nodded as if he were resolved to break his bad habit, but none of his companions believed the resolution would be very long remembered by the fat boy. Stacy's companions were right in their estimate of him.

CHAPTER XX

LOOK WHO'S HERE!

BY this time Jed Whitman had been to the camp and taken away Stacy's pony.

Before leaving the village, Professor Zepplin, without going into details, had written to Banker Perkins that they found themselves unexpectedly short of funds, and urging that the next remittance be speeded eastward.

"My pony gone!" wailed Stacy, upon discovering his loss. "Oh, why didn't one of you other fellows save me by giving up your pony instead? *I* can't walk."

"Cheer up," laughed Tad. "The worst is yet to come for you, Chunky. Do you realize that we haven't a penny left, and that we've no credit in this town? We can't eat until Mr. Perkins' remittance arrives—after a few days."

"Can't eat?" gasped Stacy, his face paling a little. "I won't stand that."

"Hurrah!" cheered Ned Rector. "Chunky is going to save us! He's going to find food for us. We shall *eat*—right away!"

"Now, you fellows know I can't do anything," uttered young Brown reproachfully. "But some of you ought to have the brains to find a way to get food."

Tad and Ned whispered apart, then announced that they were going to the village.

"Bring back half a dozen big steaks," Stacy called after them.

Tad and Ned trudged on into town. There they found an opportunity to saw and split a large pile of wood for fifty cents. That was a fearfully close bargain, as they knew very well, but the Pony Rider Boys needed food, and so did their companions. They took the job, spent perspiring hours over it, then collected their money, and invested it in a fairly large piece of bacon, to the delight of Stacy Brown and the keen satisfaction of the Professor.

"We have a big job to-morrow for which we are going to get a dollar and a half," announced Tad. "Stacy will have to go along and help."

"What doing?" demanded the fat boy.

"Cutting wood."

"No, sir! You forget that I have a weak heart. I might drop dead," objected the fat boy.

"Then we shouldn't have to pay the costs

for you again. Professor, don't you think it would be bad for Stacy's weak heart if he were to fill up on this bacon?" asked Tad.

"Wha—what? Don't I get any supper?" cried the boy.

"You most certainly do not. If you are too weak in your heart to help cut up a little wood you are too weak to eat. That's flat. Go to bed," urged Tad.

"I—I'll work. I'll cut the wood, but if I die it will be your fault. I don't care much what becomes of me now. I want my supper."

"Professor, with your permission, we will give him a small slice of bacon," said Tad. "If it has no bad effect on him, we will give him another, a very thin slice, just before he turns in for the night."

The Professor gave permission gravely. The supper was cooked, and it did smell good to those hungry boys as they sat down to their scanty meal. Tad, with great care, chose the thinnest slice on the platter, which he handed to Chunky.

"Now bite off just a nibble at a time and chew it slowly," cautioned Tad.

"I won't. I'll swallow it whole."

Ned snatched the bacon from Stacy, whereat the fat boy sprang up and squared off for trouble.

"Sit down, young man!" commanded the Professor. "No unseemly conduct."

"If you will agree to eat as you should, you may have the bacon," said Tad.

Stacy was now in a frame of mind to agree to anything, if by so doing he could get something to eat. They warned him to take forty chews on every mouthful, under penalty of having the bacon taken away from him if he failed to do as he was ordered.

Stacy chewed dolefully, rolling his eyes from one to another of them during the chewing. He never had realized how far a thin slice of bacon would go if properly chewed. Stacy was ready for more after having made away with this piece, but the boys were firm. He could have no more until bedtime, when he would get a cold slice if he were still alive.

In the morning the fat boy got two slices of bacon, but was obliged to chew them in the same way as before. These two slices with a cup of coffee made up his breakfast. When they were ready to start for work, Stacy required some urging and a little force to get him to go along. Walter Perkins insisted on accompanying them and doing his share of the work.

Something like an hour later four boys might have been observed in a vacant lot in the

village hard at work. Walter Perkins and Chunky Brown were using a crosscut saw, while Tad and Ned were wielding axes, making the sticks fairly fly from the sharp blades.

A few hours later a horseman came riding slowly down the street. As he drew nearer he brushed a hand across his eyes, looked, then shading his eyes looked again.

"Great Smoke! What does this mean?" he exclaimed, gazing at the busy workers with wondering eyes. Clucking to his horse he jogged along, but the boys did not see him, so busy were they at their work, until he had ridden over into the lot and was almost upon them.

"Mr. Vaughn!" cried Walter.

"Hurrah!" shouted Ned Rector. "Here's the guide come back. I never was so glad to see anyone in my life."

Tad, at the first call, looked; then, dropping his axe, he ran to the guide and grasped his hand, while two boys were tugging at the other hand on the opposite side of the horse.

"How is your foot?" asked Ned.

"It is better."

"Why did you come here? You didn't hope to find us in this place, did you?" questioned Tad shrewdly.

"To tell the truth, I did," answered Cale.

"Then you heard?"

"I heard last night that they had Mr. Stacy in limbo for killing that moose, so I started out right away. I rode most of the night from my home and I'm here. How did you get off?"

"Stacy was fined one hundred dollars and costs, Mr. Vaughn. The costs amounted to twenty-eight dollars and a half. What do you think of that?"

"What does this mean?" demanded Cale when the two were out of range of the others.

"Oh, we are filling in a little time," answered Tad carelessly.

"You are sure that is all?"

"All I care to speak about."

"Where shall I find Professor Zepplin?"

"He is at the camp. You go down this street till you come to the hotel. There you turn to the left and go to the end of the road. The camp is straight ahead from that."

"I reckon you had better go with me."

"I can't do that. You see I have agreed to do this job here," replied the freckle-faced boy, flushing under the keen gaze of the guide.

"So that's the trouble, is it?"

"I don't know what you mean, sir?"

"Yes you do. You know it took all the money you folks had to settle that fine, and that you are trying to earn some money to keep you going till you hear from home."

"Stacy's pony is in pawn for twenty-eight dollars and fifty cents. Jed Whitman is holding it for costs and to save Chunky from going to the Bangor jail."

"Why didn't you say so before?" Cale demanded. "I want you to come with me at once."

Tad demurred, but the guide insisted. Vaughn rode straight down the street until he came to the bank, where Tad assisted him to dismount. Rather to Tad's amazement Cale entered the bank, and greeted the cashier cordially.

"Joe, I want some money."

"All right, Cale. How much?"

"I reckon about two hundred will do me today."

"Sure thing. How long do you want it for?"

"Till I come this way again. Maybe a week, maybe a month. Make out the note for thirty days. I shall probably pay it before that."

"That is an easy way to get money," gasped Tad.

"For some folks. Here, take this and get your pony out of pawn, settle your bills and get ready to move. I see I've got to go along with you boys. I should never have left you, broken bones or no broken bones. Go on now and fix that matter up. Not a word. You may pay me back when you get your remittance."

CHAPTER XXI

YOUNG WOODSMEN ON THE TRAIL

IT was a happy lot of boys that gathered in the camp of the Pony Rider Boys that night. They sat down to a full meal once more, and Stacy Brown's "weak heart" was forgotten in the general good cheer.

After supper the question of their future movements came up for discussion. Cale decided that if the others were agreeable, the main party had better move on to the woods, leaving someone there to bring the money when the remittance should have arrived from home.

Professor Zepplin suggested that Charlie John might stay in town to wait for the money, but Cale did not like the idea. He asked Tad how he would like the job.

"Fine," glowed the freckle-faced boy.

"But how could he find us?" protested Professor Zepplin.

"The same as any good woodsman would. Follow the trail."

"I'll stay with him. If he can't find the trail, I can," spoke up Chunky.

"I pity Tad if you remain with him," answered Rector.

"I will blaze the trail so they can't miss it, Professor. We shall have three or four days for exploration before Butler and Brown get in, then we will move on. By the way, Master Tad, when you get your money you might drop into the bank and take up that note if you wish. If it is going to make you short, of course the note may stand until I get back."

"Take it up, by all means," ordered the Professor. "The favor has been a big one to us. We shall never forget it."

"Then you are going to take a new trail from here?" asked Tad.

"Yes. We will follow the trail you took in coming in here for, say five miles, after which we shall branch off. You will find the turning-off place clearly marked."

"Oh, I will see that he doesn't get lost," declared Chunky. "You leave it all to me."

"Yes, if you are looking for trouble, leave it to Chunky," retorted Ned.

The plans were laid in detail that night. At daybreak on the following morning Tad Butler and Stacy Brown saw their companions riding away. The two boys watched them until the party had disappeared, all waving their hats at the lads who had been left behind.

"Now, Chunky, you are in my charge. If you don't behave yourself, I shall be under the painful necessity of giving you a thrashing."

"You bet it will be painful for you if you try it," retorted the fat boy.

"I certainly shall try it if you give me cause. See if you can't act like other folks."

"I don't want to be like other folks. I'm satisfied to be Stacy Brown."

"I reckon you will be that as long as you live. And there's only one Stacy," answered Tad laughingly. "But remember, you are not in favor with Squire Halliday," warned the boy.

It was four days after the departure of their companions when the remittance came, Banker Perkins having wired to a bank in Bangor to hasten funds to the boys at Matungamook, thus saving at least two days for them. Tad cashed the draft at the bank and took up Cale Vaughn's note as arranged, after which the boys packed their kits and set out for the trail into the wilderness.

Neither boy was at all apprehensive about his ability to find the way. Tad knew that he should find the trail plainly marked, and he did. Along about noon they found the point where the two trails diverged and halted there for a bit to eat, and to give their ponies a rest.

The journey to the place where the others were to camp was fully thirty miles farther in. It was a long jaunt for two boys, but Vaughn had perfect confidence in Tad's ability to follow the trail.

After resting for an hour the boys continued until night. They made camp before dark, building a fire and constructing a small lean-to, not having their tents with them. They were as handy at taking care of themselves as if they had been in the woods all of their lives. Stacy Brown appeared to have turned over a new leaf. He worked like a good fellow. There was now no toil about the camp too hard for the fat boy.

They lay down to sleep early in the evening, after piling plenty of wood on the fire, and slept soundly until daybreak. A quick breakfast and they were off.

"There is the trail," said Stacy, pointing to a blaze on a big spruce.

Tad glanced about him inquiringly before starting. He saw that the blazed trail took a bend at that point, branching off to the right a little. This did not arouse any suspicion in his mind, for he did not know the route taken by Cale Vaughn, depending wholly on the blazes and other trail marks.

All that day they continued on their jour-

ney. Tad decided that they should reach the camp early on the following forenoon.

Instead of reaching the camp in the morning, the following night found them still following the trail. Tad was somewhat troubled when they made camp that night. Still, the camp might be much farther from town than Cale had thought. The boys consulted and decided to go on.

That night they found a campfire, or rather the remains of one. The fire was two or three days old and the small greens were trampled down about the place as if quite a party had camped there. This encouraged the boys, and next morning they went on with renewed courage. They kept on going until the morning of the fourth day when the trail brought up abruptly at the side of a small lake. There it ended.

"Well, we seem to be in something of a quandary, Chunky," said Tad.

"It looks that way. What are you going to do?"

"Follow the shore of the lake around until I find the trail again," answered Butler confidently. "They must have landed somewhere. It looks to me as if they had swum their horses over, though I don't see any hoof-marks on the shore. That is what puzzles me."

"Giddap," said Stacy in answer. The boys started to encircle the lake. In order to do so, they were obliged to work back into the forest some distance at one point, traveling more than a mile in what they supposed was a direction parallel to the lake.

At last they came out on the shore again, and Tad gazed in amazement.

"Stacy," he said, "do you see anything peculiar about this body of water?"

"Well," answered the fat boy wisely, "it appears to have shrunk some since we saw it last."

"That is what I think. There is something peculiar about it. It doesn't look to me like the same body of water."

"Oh, yes it is. It's the same old pond."

"Then we will complete our circuit of it if we can. Wouldn't it be funny if we got lost?"

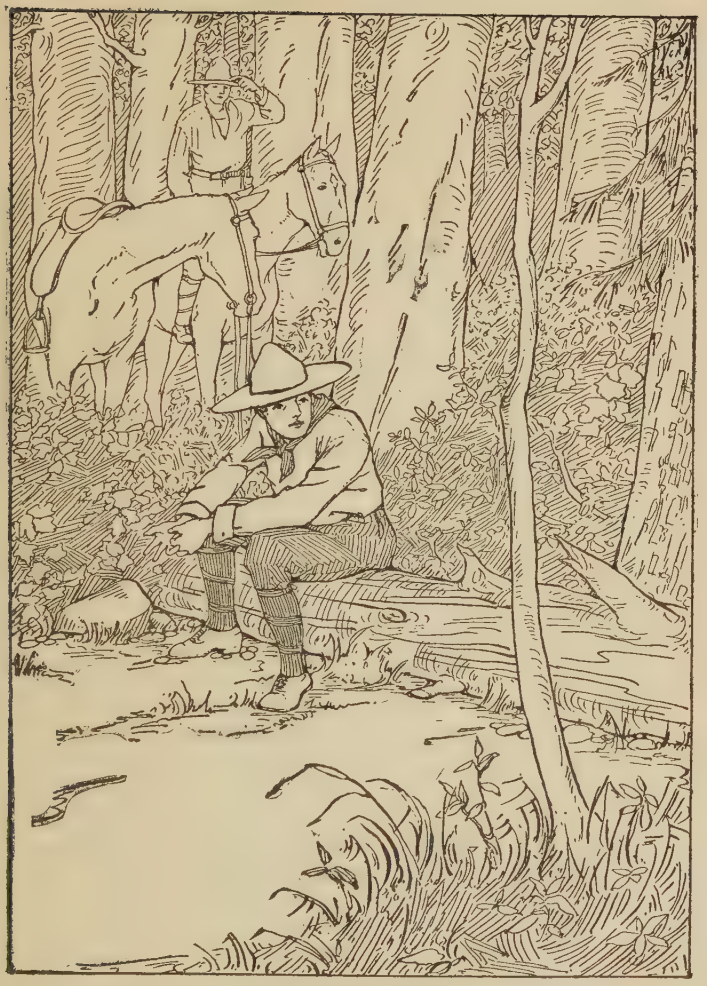
"Not to me, it wouldn't. I can get along without that."

The boys had got around to the opposite side of the lake when Tad cried out joyously.

"There's a blaze," pointing to a tree from which the bark had been cut.

"I see it," answered Stacy. "They think they are playing a mighty smart trick on us, don't they?"

"It looks that way."



"We Are Lost!"

With light hearts the boys started on the new trail. It proved an easy one to follow, though they had begun to wonder if they ever were going to reach their destination. By the sun Butler kept the general direction in which they were traveling pretty well in mind. He did not think for a moment that he was on the wrong trail.

As a matter of fact another party had, in the meantime, followed the trail from the village, taking Cale's blazes to the point where they eventually turned off. It was this branch made by the strange party that Tad and Stacy had followed to the first lake. They were many, many miles from the camp of their fellows. What was still worse, they were now on yet another trail, a trail all of a year old. After a time that trail, too, ended abruptly. In trying to pick it up, or its continuation, the boys lost it altogether, nor did they find it again. Tad called a halt and getting from his pony sat down on a log.

"Are we lost?" asked Chunky solemnly.

"We are," answered Tad with equal solemnity.

CHAPTER XXII

LOST IN THE BIG WOODS

TAD BUTLER had often heard it said that a lost man was an insane man. He had laughed at this as he had laughed at the stories of men who have been lost for no longer than twenty-four hours, and who had come out gibbering idiots. Now for the first time the Pony Rider Boy began to realize what it meant to be lost. That feeling of utter isolation, of aloneness, of doubt whether they ever would find their way out, took possession of him and for the moment a panic threatened Tad Butler.

Then he recalled the advice given by Cale Vaughn: "If you get lost sit down and think it over. Don't run."

Tad *was* thinking it over. At last he said:

"Stacy, we got on the wrong trail somewhere. I have an idea it was not long after leaving town."

Chunky nodded his head slowly.

A strange feature of the situation impressed itself upon Tad at this particular juncture. He

was unable to tell his position from the sun. He could not have told whether the sun was in the East, West, North or South, and his compass proved absolutely useless. He was interrupted in his thoughts by the voice of Stacy Brown.

"We haven't enough grub for more than one more meal."

"We may have to rustle," added Tad, "but I have confidence enough in myself to believe that we shall not starve to death."

Having recovered his mental balance, Tad decided that it was time to do something, so he took careful note of the lay of the land about him, the character of the trees and shrubs, the drainage, and other features that might prove of use to him later on.

His next task was to blaze a tree. He made a conspicuous blaze on four sides of a large pine, a blaze that might be seen for some distance in either direction.

"Why are you doing that?" questioned the fat boy.

"We shall know it when we see it again. Furthermore, it will be of use to any person who may chance to be looking for us. I am going to stick like a brother to that blazed tree until I find a better place. Unpack and help me make camp."

Chunky got down slowly. He was much less disturbed than Tad would have expected.

"I will make a lean-to while you are getting the camp in shape. Wait!" Tad's voice was sharp, causing Stacy to halt suddenly. "I hear water. There is a stream near here. Yes, there it is. Hurrah!"

"I don't see anything in a little stream of water to get excited about," declared the fat boy.

"I do. It means there is a larger body of water somewhere hereabouts. You take the ponies and follow me. I am going to blaze a way down that stream for a piece anyway and see where it leads. We can't be any worse off farther down than we are here, and perhaps we may be able to better ourselves materially."

Tad, hatchet in hand, started for the creek. He turned downstream after satisfying himself which was downstream, followed slowly by Stacy. Butler blazed the way, turning down bushes, marking trees with conspicuous chops clear through the bark to the white of the wood itself, so that there might be no difficulty in finding their way back in case they desired to do so. To Tad's satisfaction they soon came out on the shore of a lake, or rather a pond it was in size. This pond gave them an open space, taking away in a measure that shut-in

feeling that had so oppressed them under the tall pines.

"Here is the place for the camp, Stacy," announced Tad joyously. "What better could a man ask for a summer resort?"

"No, this isn't so bad," admitted the fat boy. "Where do you want the camp?"

"In a little way from the shore. We might as well make it permanent, for we may be here some time."

In the meantime Tad was industriously chopping away, cutting down small trees for the lean-to. A busy two hours followed. Stacy got the browse together for the beds. Tad chopped down a larger tree for the bed pieces of their fireplace, and, by the time they had finished, the day was drawing to a close. They had not finished any too soon, but they had constructed as neat and practical a camp as ever grew under the skilled hands of an old woodsman. Tad was justly proud of their efforts.

Supper was not a bounteous meal and neither lad overloaded his stomach, but the boys were cheerful and the ponies content, for there was plenty for the animals to eat. Tad had gotten in a great pile of poles for night-wood, so that they were pretty well supplied with everything except food.

Chunky dropped asleep on his browse bed under the comforting warmth of the fire soon after supper, in fact before Tad had finished with the supper work, which was not very arduous, the boys having only a few tin dishes that hung suspended from their saddles. They had their rifles, revolvers and hunting knives, all of which might prove useful in their present predicament.

Tad sat down by the fire to think. He sat long, going over all the possibilities of their case, figuring on the probabilities of their being found. Tad knew that Cale Vaughn would never rest until he had found them, once the guide knew that the two boys were lost, so Butler decided that his wisest course would be to remain where he was, skirmish for food, and try to content himself and his comrade until help arrived.

A crashing sound brought him to his feet. The sound was unlike any he had ever heard before. Tad's first impulse was to run, then, pulling himself sharply together, he stood listening.

"Oh, pshaw, it's a big tree falling," he muttered.

The ponies, too, had been startled. They were snorting and stamping. Tad's voice quieted them.

"If this thing keeps on I am sure to have an attack of nerves. I am ashamed of myself—Great Scott, what is that?"

"Oh, wow!" howled Chunky, leaping from his browse bed, standing wide-eyed at the opening of the lean-to. "What was that?"

"I—I don't know," stammered Tad. "I—I never heard so many crazy sounds in all my life. I have heard that a night in the jungle was terrifying, but I don't believe it can be any worse than this."

"There it goes again," cried Chunky.

"Ugh-ugh-ugh, oo-oo-oo—o-o-o-o!"

The forest seemed to be full of the "ugh-oos." The Pony Rider Boys gazed into each other's faces. Stacy Brown's teeth were chattering. Again that terrifying roar.

"Wha—what is it?" gasped Chunky.

"I—I don't know," whispered Tad. "I—I never heard the like of it. It is getting nearer, too."

Tad snatched up his rifle.

"Get ready for trouble, Chunky," shouted the freckle-faced boy, the freckles standing out in blotches on his face, the latter now pale but resolute.

CHAPTER XXIII

AN EXCITING QUEST

A NEW crashing in the bushes off to the right of them caused Tad to swing about in that direction, peering apprehensively, not knowing what to expect.

"Ugh-ugh-ugh, oo-oo-ooo—o-o-o-o!"

Stacy Brown uttered a yell, for it seemed to him that the ground had shaken under his feet with that terrible roar. Stacy bolted.

"Don't run! You'll get lost!" shouted Tad.

There was no stopping the fat boy now. Fortunately Chunky did not get far. The plunging ponies sent him off in another direction, the little animals in their fear settling back on their haunches until they broke their tethers, after which they plunged away into the forest.

Tad did not have much time to think. A bellowing roar sounded almost under foot, it seemed, then suddenly a great hulk came into view. It was then that Tad understood. It was a giant moose that had been calling for its mates.

The instant the animal set eyes on the Pony Rider Boy its anger seemed to be aroused. With a bellow the animal started for him.

Tad fired from the hip. He had no time to take careful aim. As it was, his bullet nearly put an end to the moose, for the leaden missile bored a hole through one of the big ears. The boy fired again, but he was too late. The moose charged into the camp with a terrifying roar. Tad leaped aside as the beast cleared the campfire and went crashing into the lean-to, and, as he leaped, Butler's rifle was knocked from his hands.

Springing as far up a small tree as he could the Pony Rider Boy climbed as he had never climbed before. He was breathing hard, though holding himself under perfect control.

In the meantime the moose was working havoc with the camp below. The lean-to was razed to the ground in a twinkling. The great antlers were driving in here and there; browse beds went up into the air, while the beast stamped and raged, now and again uttering its weird "Ugh, ugh, ugh!"

Tad Butler had never experienced anything quite so terrifying. Yet he found himself wondering how long he would be able to cling to the tree in case the animal decided to stay in the camp. But the moose soon solved this prob-

lem for him. The beast, after threshing and tearing about until it had vented its rage, suddenly bounded away toward the beach. Tad heard the huge beast leap into the lake with a mighty splash.

The boy slid to the ground and ran to the water's edge, first having picked up his rifle, and sent a volley of shots after the moose, but he did not know whether or not any of them reached the mark. Tad's thoughts turned to his companion.

"Oh, Stacy!" he called.

"Hello," answered a voice that seemed to come from the air overhead.

Tad looked up. He saw the scared face of his companion peering down at him from a low tree.

"Come down. The fun is all over."

Stacy clambered part of the way down, then paused.

"Has he gone, sure?"

"Yes, he is on the other side of the lake by this time. Look at this camp," said Tad, surveying the remains ruefully.

"It isn't a camp; it's a hodge-podge."

"I agree with you. Let's get the fire going the first thing we do. I am afraid we shan't get much sleep to-night. By the way, you had better look to those ponies," advised Butler.

"I—I don't want to."

"Why not?"

"I guess I'm afraid."

"Pooh!"

"They're gone!" yelled the fat boy a couple of minutes later. "They have broken away."

Tad was at first startled at this announcement, but he took tight hold of himself, steadied himself, and after a moment or so had his emotions well in hand.

"Help me set the camp to rights," he said calmly.

"You aren't going to stay here, are you?"

"Of course. Where else should we go?"

"But the big, big moose may come back," protested Stacy, his teeth chattering.

"He is just as likely to call at some other place. I hardly think he will pay us another visit."

"Say, Tad."

"What?"

"It just occurs to me. What a lucky thing for you it is that you didn't kill that—that fellow."

"Why?"

"Old Halliday would have sent you to jail for life if you had."

"I am not worrying about what the squire might do to me," laughed Butler. "I have

more important matters to occupy my mind just now. Come, Chunky, get busy."

"What are you going to do about those ponies?"

"Nothing. At least, not now. We can do nothing until daylight, and perhaps not then. Do you see what has occurred?"

"I see a *lot* that has occurred," answered Stacy.

"Our dishes are gone, smashed so we shan't be able to use them again."

Stacy groaned.

"I knew something would come along to put the finishing touches on. Now what are we going to do?" he demanded.

"I don't know. I shall plan out something if we are let alone long enough."

The boys got to work at once. They toiled with a will, chopping in the light of the campfire, dragging logs, saplings and browse into the camp, making every move count, Stacy doing his part manfully.

In another hour they had made a second camp. Of course, it was not as complete as the first camp had been, but it proved to be an excellent piece of woodcraft by the time they decided to stop work for the night. Tad induced Stacy to turn in while he himself sat up to be ready in case of a return of their visitor.

The problem over which the Pony Rider Boy was now working was how to replace their ruined cooking outfit. He could get along very well with everything except boiling his water. Tad pondered and pondered over this, trying to recall something he had learned from Mr. Vaughn. After a time it came to him.

"I've got it!" exclaimed the boy. Grabbing up his hatchet he darted out towards the lake front.

Finding a birch tree, of which he was in search, Butler peeled off a long, thin sheet of bark, free from either knots or "eyes." From this he constructed a trough-shaped bucket after several clumsy attempts, in which he nearly ruined his material. The folds of this bucket were pinned together with green twigs, below what was to be the water line. This simple affair being completed Tad raked a bed of coals from the fire, placing the bucket on them after he had taken it down to the lake and filled it with water.

The Pony Rider Boy sat squatting in front of the bucket observing it eagerly. His patience was rewarded within five minutes. The water in the bucket began to boil.

"I guess we will have our coffee in the morning," he chuckled triumphantly. "But I forgot; we have no coffee pot. I don't see why I

can't make one in the same way." Tad did. It was not a handsome pot, but it was almost worth its weight in gold to the two boys.

Stacy, on getting up that morning, saw the water boiling merrily on a bed of hot coals. He eyed the contrivance curiously.

"What do you call that thing?" he demanded.

"That, sir, is my patent water boiler."

"Oh!"

"What did you think it was?"

"I thought it was a steam engine. I didn't know but you were going to start a sawmill out here. Good place for one, isn't it?"

"There is plenty of material here," nodded Tad.

"Say, what are you doing?" demanded the fat boy, peering, craning his neck at Tad who was busily engaged with his back turned towards his companion.

"I am getting breakfast."

"Yes, but your motions are suspicious. That's the way my aunt acts when she is cleaning fish."

"I *am* cleaning fish."

"*What?*"

"Look!"

Tad held up for the inspection of the fat boy a handsome speckled trout, fully twelve inches long. Stacy threw a hand to his eyes.

"Don't! Don't! I can't stand it to be tortured this way!"

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Tad sharply.

"Don't torture me by playing such ghastly jokes on my appetite," begged Chunky.

"You must be crazy. This is a trout that I caught this morning from the lake, with a rig I made. There are two apiece. If two of these fat fellows don't satisfy your appetite I don't know what will."

"Yeow!" howled Chunky.

"Stop your nonsense. Go get two nice hardwood sticks about two feet long, and a-half inch thick. Peel them and give them to me."

"What are you going to do?"

"Oh, don't ask so many questions, unless you don't care about breakfast."

"Don't care about breakfast?" fairly shrieked the fat boy. "I'd sell my shirt for a full meal right now."

"I will let you off cheaper than that," laughed Butler. "Dump some coffee into the coffee pot. You know how much to put in. What about those sticks?"

Stacy having brought the sticks, Tad sharpened them; then, spitting a trout on each, held the fish over the glowing bed of coals that he had massed for the purpose. The red and blue

of the trout began slowly turning to a rich brown, and a savory odor, almost maddening to the hungry Stacy Brown, filled the air.

"You will have to get along without salt this morning. I'm going to make some as soon as I can get to it," promised Tad.

"Never mind the salt. Hurry! How are you going to make salt?"

"Mr. Vaughn says that the Indians use the ashes of hickory bark as a substitute for salt, and that it is fine. To obtain the ash he says the stem and leaves are first rolled up into balls while green, and, after being carefully dried, are placed on a very small fire on a rock and burned."

"Huh! I am mighty glad you aren't going to stop to make salt before breakfast," answered Chunky. "Give me that trout."

"It isn't done yet."

"I can't help that. Give it to me."

"Oh, if you want to be a wild animal, why dip in."

Chunky did. He devoured the fish, bones and all, though he did decide not to eat the head. He ate the other end, though. While Stacy was thus enjoying himself, Butler cooked the other fish. By that time the coffee was ready and the two lost boys sat down to their breakfast, while the forest resounded with the shrill "ah, te-te,

te-te, te'' of the white-throated sparrow, the songs of the chickadee and blue-jay, the thrumming of the pigeon woodpecker, the cries of the whistler-duck and the scream of the fish-hawk and the eagle.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE SIGNAL SMOKE

THERE was silence in the camp until the last of the fish had disappeared down the throats of the hungry boys. After breakfast Tad ordered Stacy to clear away the things and set the camp to rights while he went out to look for the ponies.

He was extremely careful to blaze his trail so that there could be no mistake in following it back. At the same time Tad had learned to look about him to make sure that no other blazes cut into his trail. To be side-tracked into a strange trail now would be a tragedy, indeed. He trailed the ponies unerringly, and found them much sooner than he had hoped. The little animals were grazing in a dell about a mile from camp.

Tad secured them without difficulty and started back to camp with them. Stacy was in a worry over his companion's long absence. The fat boy, without the resourceful Tad, would have been helpless, and it is probable that in such circumstances Chunky would have

starved to death, to him the most terrible death a human being could have.

"Now, Chunky," asked Butler, "do you see that mountain yonder?"

"Yes. It's a high one, isn't it?"

"Yes. I am going up there."

"What for?"

"To spend the day signaling. The question is, do you want to stay here and watch the camp, or do you—"

"What! Stay here alone? I guess not. No, sir!"

"I was in hopes you would be willing to do that. You don't want to spend the rest of your life up here, do you?"

"I should think not."

"Then you must try to do your share. I am not saying that you have not; you have done the best you knew how."

"Yes, I got myself arrested," nodded the fat boy. "What do you want me to do?"

"I want you, if you will take this matter seriously, to stay here in camp and look after it."

"Take it seriously? Pshaw! You think I think this is a kind of picnic. I guess not. It hasn't been like any other picnic I ever attended. All right; I'll stay here. But why are you making up your mind to go up to the top of that mountain now?"

"I'll tell you. We have been away from our party for some time. They will begin to get worried about our long absence about this time. That means that Mr. Vaughn will get busy. Understand?"

Stacy nodded thoughtfully.

"That is why."

"Go ahead. I will defend this camp with my very life. I'll shoot on sight the first time I see anything moving."

"I guess I had better take you along," observed Tad dryly.

Butler had reasoned out the situation rightly. There was a great disturbance in the main camp of the Pony Rider Boys. This was due to the hasty return of Charlie John who had been sent back to Matungamook as fast as a horse could carry him to learn what had become of the boys. He brought back the word that they had left about a week before that.

"Break camp instantly!" commanded the guide. "We must look for them. They are lost."

"That's what we get for letting Stacy Brown go with Tad. Stacy would hoodoo the best organized force in the world," declared Ned.

"Cache all the stuff we do not need. Take enough to last for a week. We shall find them by that time," said the guide.

"Do—do you think—" began the Professor hesitatingly.

"I think they are lost. I know they are," answered Cale. "But I have too much confidence in Master Tad to think for a moment that he isn't taking care of himself and his companion. Of course other things may have happened. John, did you see any place where they might have left the trail?"

"Me see where fat boy go other way," was the surprising reply.

"I thought so. Nothing escapes the eyes of an Indian, even if he is a half-breed Kanuck," snapped the guide.

There was no laughter on the faces of the Pony Rider Boys now. They were deeply concerned over the fate of their two companions, the Professor more troubled than any of the others, because he had not been in favor of permitting the two lads to make their way alone back to the camp.

The party was under way within an hour after the return of Charlie John from town. Night found them still plodding along, a silent procession, led by the Indian, Vaughn to the rear of him watching the trail with keen, observant eyes.

Nor did they stop until morning. Then only for breakfast and to rest the stock. They

reached the branching of the trail late that day. A brief examination told the guide that what the Indian had said was true. The lads had gotten on the wrong trail. No time was lost by Cale in getting on it, but this trail was not so easy to follow at night as had been the other. As a result they did not make much headway that night.

The next morning they found the place where the boys had made a stop. Both the white guide and the Indian studied the surroundings, learning some things that they did not tell their companions.

The third day found them at the lake first discovered by Tad and Stacy. In the trail they read the story of the two boys missing the lake and landing on the shore of the second lake. Then suddenly the trail was lost. Vaughn could not understand it. Somehow he had strayed, as had the two boys who had gone before them.

"I want you people to make camp right here and to remain here until I come back," said Vaughn.

"Oh, please don't make us sit here idle," begged Rector. "Don't you see we have got to do something?"

"Come along then," answered the guide, after a brief reflection. "But when we make

wide detours, you will remain as a sort of center or hub to the wheel we shall be making. In that way I think we shall not be detained very much. Minutes may be precious, you know."

An hour's faithful work on the part of the Indian and the guide failed to reveal any trace of the missing lads. Later in the day Vaughn came to the spot where Tad and Stacy had halted, intending to make camp. He found Tad's four blazes on the big pine. An examination told him that the blazes had been placed there recently. The guide uttered a shout.

"We are on their track now. We've found the trail. Clever boy, Tad! Clever boy. Trust him to do the right thing at the right time."

The Indian who had gone on ahead called back that the trail lay in the direction of the lake. The party hastened on after him. They reached the camp of Tad and Stacy, but the camp was deserted. Cale placed a hand on the dead campfire.

"They haven't been here in more than twenty-four hours," he announced.

Walter and Ned groaned. The perspiration was standing out in great beads on the forehead of Professor Zepplin.

"Heap big smoke," grunted the Indian, loping into camp. He had followed the shore of the lake to the westward around a bend.

"Eh?" demanded Cale.

"Heap big smoke."

"Where? Where?"

The Indian pointed, then started down the shore again, followed by the entire party. They halted some distance from the camp, and again Charlie pointed. The boys and the men gazed at the peak of the high mountain which Tad had pointed out to his companion two days before that. As the Indian pointed a cloud of grayish smoke rose from the forest crowning the mountain. An interval of a minute, then came another, then still another.

"It's a signal!" cried Vaughn. "Wait!"

Ten minutes later the three-cloud smoke signal was made again. There could be no mistake about it. Some one was making an Indian smoke signal. Vaughn gave the rifle signal in acknowledgment. There was no reply. He gave it again. For the third time did he give it, then from the distance came a rifle shot. A pause followed, then three more shots.

"We've got 'em!" cried Cale Vaughn triumphantly.

"Boys make good Indians," grunted Charlie John.

Ned and Walter set up a yell.

"Build a smudge, Charlie," commanded the guide. "I am going out to meet whoever it is.

Send your smoke up as high as you can, Charlie."

"Me smoke um."

"Not one of you must leave the camp," wound up the guide.

Regardless of his still lame foot, Cale Vaughn started off at a run, and was lost to view in a moment. Then the boys, the Professor and the Indian took account of their surroundings. The results of Tad Butler's ingenuity were apparent on all sides. The Professor proudly pointed out what Tad had accomplished as an object lesson that they would do well to remember. They were shortly interrupted by three signal shots, but did not know whether these had been fired by the guide or by the persons who had made the smudge. They decided to answer the shots, but Charlie John shook his head.

"No shoot. Fool guide, fool boys if do," he said.

It was late in the afternoon, in fact near dark, when a yell startled the campers. Then came another yell, and a shot, and Tad Butler, followed by the howling Stacy, came tearing into camp on their ponies, leaping logs, roots, stumps and rocks. A moment more and the boys were hugging each other delightedly. Such a cheer as the four set up together startled the birds that had sought their roosting

perches for the night. Then came another startling sound.

"Ugh, ugh, ugh, oo-oo-oo!"

Stacy's eyes widened.

"There—there's that moose fellow that put our camp out of business the other night. Take to the trees, fellows! He'll be here in a minute."

"Never mind. Don't be frightened," answered the guide. "That isn't the fellow who bothered your camp. That one lies dead some five miles to the north of here with several of your bullets in his body," added Cale with a twinkle in his eyes.

"How did you know about that?" demanded Tad, wheeling on him sharply.

"Never mind how I knew. I usually use my eyes when I am in the woods. And I want to say, right here, that you two boys have fulfilled all my expectations. You went astray as many a better man will go, as I have gone myself, but you have shown more pure woodcraft than ninety-nine men out of any hundred would have shown. I am proud of you. I take off my hat to you."

"Yes," answered Stacy pompously. "I always was an expert at finding my way about in the woods."

That evening the party sat long about the

campfire, listening to the story of the experiences of the two lost boys. The story of the charge of the moose and the wrecking of the camp caused Ned Rector and Walter Perkins to open their eyes very wide.

"Young man," remarked Cale Vaughn, addressing Chunky, "you will do well if you don't let your tongue get away from you and rush on to tell everyone about Tad shooting at the moose that wrecked your camp. If you do, you'll by and by get the story around to where *you,* instead of Tad, shot the animal, and how the animal dropped dead on the spot."

"It would make a fine and dandy story," remarked Chunky, as he chewed reflectively at a blade of grass.

"It would," admitted Cale, "and all stories of that kind travel to the ears of Squire Halliday very quickly. Don't forget that the squire is still doing business in his little old office six days a week. More than that, just keep well in mind the fact that the squire would probably send you to jail next time. Brown, I've been in quite a bit of the world outside of Maine; I was a scout in the world war and did my bit for my country, and I've always kept my eyes open. A fellow had to over there. So I've noticed that nearly all the trouble a fellow gets into is trouble that his tongue gets him into."

The boys nodded their heads in agreement.

"Don't talk too much," continued the guide, "not at any time, and when you do talk always tell the truth. You've seen a great deal of trouble, haven't you?"

"Yes," admitted Stacy Brown, assuming the air of a man of the world. "I've had so much trouble that I've grown old in it."

Then, as the other boys began to laugh, Stacy saw the drift of the guide's remarks.

"But not trouble that my tongue got me into," he made haste to add. "I'm a silent, thoughtful sort of fellow. If you haven't seen enough of me to know that, then just ask these fellows."

"Yes, Cale," cried Ned. "Chunky's deaf and dumb when he's asleep or eating."

Cale nodded and smiled.

"Young man, the next time you get into difficulties, just hold an honest, searching experience meeting with yourself," suggested Cale dryly, "and see if you can't find the mean part your tongue has played in your affairs. That's all."

"I'm sorry we missed the bull moose incident," sighed Ned Rector. "I knew that if Stacy stayed behind something surely would happen, but I never dreamed that it would be anything that I'd hate to miss."

"It wasn't much fun at the time—take my word for that," Tad uttered grimly.

"No, but it is going to be a great event one of these days," suggested Ned innocently, stealing a glance at the fat boy.

"When?" Walter wanted to know.

"When we see Chunky's version of the affair in the home paper. After that paper comes out, though, I am going to teach Chunky a lesson."

"What kind of a lesson?" demanded Stacy suspiciously.

"After your story comes out in home print," laughed Ned, "I'm going to take all the wind out of your sails by telling everybody in town the real version of the affair."

"You just dare," flared Chunky.

"Why?" queried Walter mildly. "Do you mean, Stacy, that you would knowingly give a false version to the home paper, and that you'd resent having Ned tell the people the straight account of the matter?"

"I mean," sputtered Chunky. "I mean—Well, I mean that I won't have anybody else mixing up in my business and trying to make me look ridiculous. That's what I mean, and I mean it."

"No fellow looks half so ridiculous," put in Tad quietly, "as the fellow who tells yarns

about his achievements that no one in the home town would think of believing. Remember your lion story, Chunky, as printed in the Chillicothe paper?''

''Yes. And it was a mighty good story, too,'' declared young Brown. ''The editor told me so.''

''What do you suppose no less than three persons at home asked me?'' Tad went on. ''They wanted to know how it was that you never did anything at home to amount to a hill of beans, yet, as soon as you got a few hundred miles away, you invariably began to prove yourself a wonder. You see people are beginning to size your stories up.''

''Who asked you that?'' demanded Chunky heatedly.

Tad shook his head smiling, declining to give names.

But Chunky was growing wrathful. A look of suspicion in his eyes, he began to glare around at the other boys. Even staid old Professor Zepplin he regarded with considerable disfavor.

''The trouble with you fellows,'' broke in Chunky, after two full minutes of actual silence, ''is that you can't recognize genius and greatness when you mix up with them. You're always picking on me, you fellows. You—''

Choking with indignation, Stacy rose and began to walk away, his fists clenched. But Tad Butler, with a laugh, leaped up and darted after the offended boy.

"Stacy, old fellow, why be so touchy? What on earth would we do on our trips if we didn't have you along? Who would supply the fun and the jokes for us?"

Tad forced open the boy's right fist, then shook hands with him, smiling the while.

"I'm never going out with you fellows on another trip," Stacy declared stubbornly.

"How are your folks going to stop you?" Tad wanted to know. "Are they going to tie you hand and foot, and lash you down to rings in the floor of the Brown mansion. Oh, pshaw! Forget it!"

"They won't have to," growled Stacy. "I don't want to go anywhere with you fellows any more."

"You come right back and shake hands with Walter and Ned," Tad commanded. "Then you may tell them about your new resolve."

Despite the fat boy's resistance, Tad led him back to the circle. There, Stacy reluctantly shook hands all around, and inside of five minutes he was chatting away with his usual good humor.

For a few days more the Pony Riders roved

through the woods. Then, most regretfully—on both sides—the boys and their tutor parted from Cale Vaughn. At Bangor they found a pile of home letters awaiting them. Best of all were the letters that Tad received from his mother. She had regained her health, she wrote, and was putting on flesh at a rate that would soon be cause for alarm and—fasting.

It was some months before Cale Vaughn settled, to his satisfaction, the score against Squire Halliday and the game warden. Cale had a wide and valuable acquaintance throughout the state, and in time he secured the removal from office of Squire Halliday, who didn't need the justice's fees anyway. Jed, too, "walked the plank" in favor of a new game warden for that section.

As for the Pony Rider Boys, they were already planning a trip to the South, from which they would not return until late in the fall.

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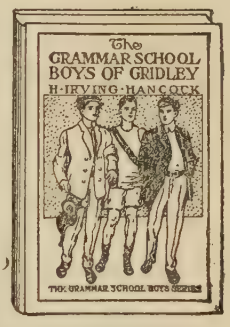

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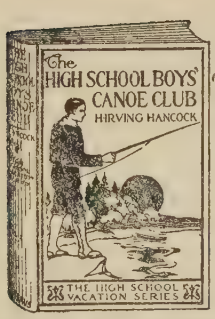

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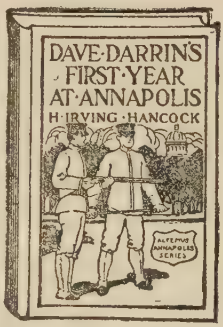

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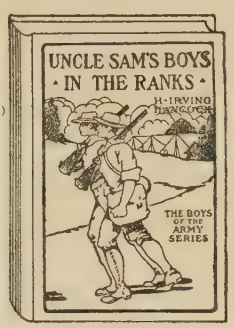

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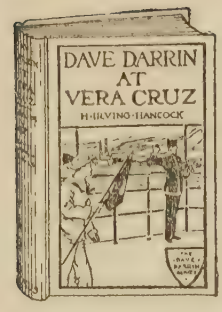

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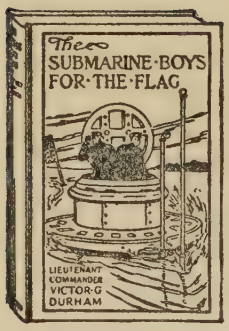

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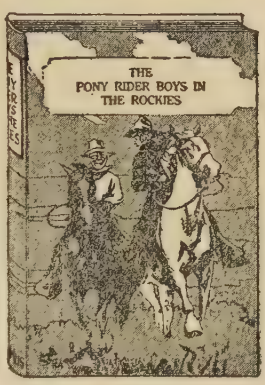

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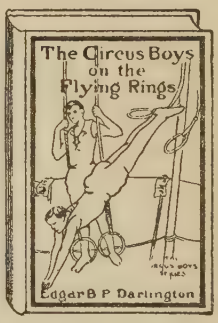

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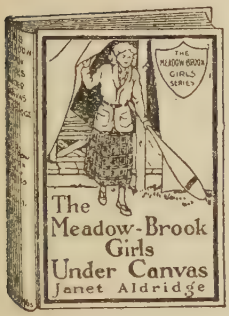

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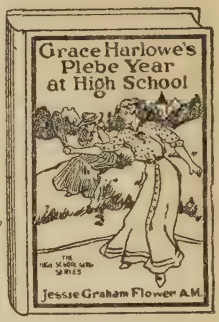

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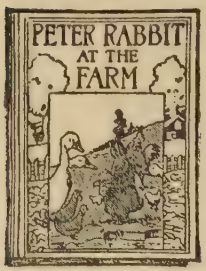

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